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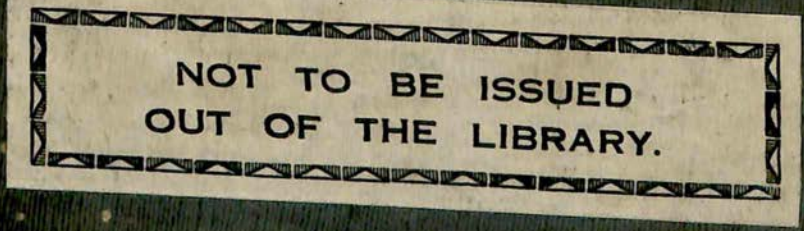
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John Wilkes

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BIOGRAPHIES

OF

JOHN WILKES

AND

WILLIAM COBBETT

BY THE

REV. JOHN SELBY WATSON

M.A. F.R.S.L.

22974
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WITH PORTRAITS

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PREFACE.

THIS Biography of JOHN WILKES is intended to enable the reader to form a just estimate of his character, private as well as public.

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THE great characteristic of the demagogue, from the earliest times to the present, has ever been the same; a desire to gain advantage for himself, under pretence of benefiting a multitude too short-sighted to discern his real aims, by opposition to authority that he stigmatises as oppressive. It has been thought fortunate for the people of Rome that they were never troubled with that low class of selfish adventurers that were the pests of Greece, and especially of Athens; men like Cleon and Demades, who cared nothing for the evil that they might bring on their country, if they

might but raise themselves into importance by resistance to constituted government; men who headed mobs for the redress of fancied grievances, in the expectation of putting more money into their purses through political commotions than they could have earned by honest occupation. Rome, however, had its restless tribunes; and many of them, though they were in general better principled than the reckless disturbers of Greece, were nevertheless ready to seize on any favourable occasion for exalting themselves into power. What country, indeed, has not been disquieted with adventurers of this kind? We have seen them among ourselves as well as in other nations. If any good to the public, here or elsewhere, has arisen from their proceedings, it was not because public good was their object; and if they profited others, it was only while they were striving to profit themselves.

If we review the career of the demagogue so prominent in this country in the middle of the last century, the notorious John Wilkes, we shall find him actuated, and that on his own avowal, by the same motives by which his predecessors in similar courses have been influenced. We are the rather inclined to take such a glance at his doings, as we know how variously his character has been regarded, and have seen a recent attempt, in one of our periodicals, to exalt him into an honest man, a true patriot, and an eminent scholar. For our own part, we shall state nothing respecting his deserts, public or private, that is not sustained either by his own statements, or by other unquestionable authority. We shall find his life, if we mistake not, to have been of the same texture, morally considered, throughout, in

regard both to himself and to others; and that texture of such a description, that no disinterested aspirations for the public good could be expected from a person of such dispositions and conduct.

John Wilkes was the second son of Israel Wilkes, and was descended from one Luke Wilkes, who, in the reign of Charles II., had held the office of chief Yeoman of the King's Wardrobe. Israel Wilkes was a wealthy distiller in London, and increased his wealth by marrying a Miss Heaton, heiress to certain houses in Hoxton Square, and other property. She was of some dissenting persuasion, and after his marriage he often went with her to a meeting-house at Highgate, riding, from love of display, in a coach drawn by six horses.

The other sons of Israel Wilkes, whose names occasionally appear in their brother's biography, were Israel, the eldest, who, after an unsatisfactory partnership in a Manchester agency in London, settled at last in New York; and Heaton, who succeeded to his father's business, but, mismanaging it, betook himself to the bankrupt's resource, the coal trade, and being unfortunate in that also, though he contrived, through his connections, to keep himself afloat in the mercantile world, died poor at the age of seventy-two.

John Wilkes was born on the 17th of October 1727, and was sent for the rudiments of education to Hertford, from whence he was removed, under the influence of his mother, to a small school kept by a dissenting minister at Aylesbury. As he showed talent, and a liking for books, his father resolved to bring him up to the law, and spent money on his education, it is said, to the neglect of his other children.

In the neighbourhood of the school, at Aylesbury House, lived Mrs Mead, the dissenting widow of a rich drysalter. This person had one daughter, heiress to great property from both her parents; and as she was an intimate friend of Mrs Wilkes, the two mothers began to concert schemes for a marriage, when time should serve, between their two children. But, first, it was thought proper that the youngster should be further educated, and see something of the world; and he was accordingly sent, under the care of the same dissenting minister, to Leyden, where he read a great number of the Latin classics, and expressed great admiration of Cicero, Virgil, and Tacitus. To the Greek writers he gave less attention. His acquirements, he used to say, were the result rather of his own efforts than the instructions of his preceptors. His studies seem to have been mostly in the lighter kind of literature, though he paid some regard to other subjects, as is shown by his intercourse with the Scotch metaphysician, Andrew Baxter, with whom he formed an acquaintance abroad, and who, when he published, in 1750, 'An Appendix to his Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul,' thought highly enough of Wilkes, then only in his twenty-third year, while he himself was in his sixty-seventh, to dedicate the book to him, observing that it consisted of matter on which they had discoursed in the Capuchins' Garden at Spa. At the political career of his "dear John Wilkes," as he calls him in his dedication, he did not live to be astonished, dying in the same year in which the book was printed.

When he returned from Leyden, he appeared among his countrymen as a man of fashion, distinguishing

himself by a refinement of politeness, and by the gaiety of his conversation. At the desire of his father and mother, he paid frequent visits to Mrs Mead and her daughter at Aylesbury; and such was the effect of his manner, that, notwithstanding the repulsiveness of a strong squint, he gained the affections of Miss Mead in a very short time, and married her in October 1749. The mother then removed from Aylesbury, and took up her residence with her daughter and son-in-law in Red Lion Court, in a house which was part of the lady's inheritance. Here, in August 1750, a daughter, the only fruit of their union, was born.

Disliking Red Lion Court, and wishing to reside in a more fashionable quarter of the town, he took a house, much against the will of his wife's mother, in Great George Street, Westminster. Here he set up an expensive establishment, and adopted a style of living far more ostentatious than that to which the Meads and their dissenting friends had been accustomed. He gave splendid dinners almost daily, and seemed to set economy at defiance. But this was not the worst; he drew about him a number of the licentious and profane, whose morals and language shocked his wife's delicacy and religious feelings. She remonstrated with him on his conduct. He refused to alter it. At last she withdrew from his table, and left him to entertain what guests he pleased. The education of the husband and wife, as children, had been different; their modes of thinking were now, as *man and woman*, totally dissimilar; and estrangement between them was easily strengthened by the disparity of their ages, the wife being ten years older than the husband. Religion was

no cause of disagreement on his side; for though he adhered to the Church of England, he often accompanied his wife to the meeting-house. Thirty years afterwards he spoke of his marriage, in his light unfeeling style, as "a union formed in his non-age, to please an indulgent father, with a woman half as old again as himself; a sacrifice to Plutus, not to Venus; a stumble at the threshold of Hymen's temple; while

> 'The god of love was not a bidden guest,
> Nor present at his own mysterious feast.'

He also speaks of having been dragged to the altar at a schoolboy age. But he was old enough to have some judgment of his own, and it nowhere appears that he offered any opposition.

His connection with Aylesbury had brought him into contact with one of the members for that borough, Thomas Potter, the profligate son of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Him he introduced to his wife, with Sir Francis Dashwood, afterwards Lord le Despenser, the Earl of Sandwich, Sir Francis Blake Delaval, Sir William Stanhope, Sir Thomas Stapleton, Paul Whitehead, and others equally unprincipled and shameless, whose names are now forgotten. The worst of the set, however, is believed to have been Potter, but for whose poison, in the judgment of Mr Almon, Wilkes would have been somewhat less bad than he proved.

When a general election occurred, in 1754, these friends of Wilkes urged him to attempt to get into Parliament. Potter flattered his vanity by telling him that it was the only way in which he could fairly display his talents. He resolved, in the hope of being

supported by the Delaval interest, to try the town of Berwick. His mother-in-law, his wife, and his father, strongly dissuaded him from the project, fearing that he would be led into expenses beyond his means; but

"Clamet amica
Mater, honesta soror, cum cognatis, pater, uxor,"

whoever opposed him, he was resolved to have his way. He endeavoured to cajole the electors of Berwick in an address, in which he commenced the cant which he so long continued, about the "cause of liberty," to which he had heard of their "steady attachment," and which he "had always had nearest to his heart," and "valued beyond everything;" assuring them that he would always be "uncorrupting and uncorrupted," and always "free from private views," and use his utmost efforts "to maintain the constitution of this happy country."

His professions were of no avail; he gained but few votes, and lost between three and four thousand pounds; a result which may well raise a suspicion that he was not "uncorrupting."

When he returned from Berwick he was coldly received by his wife and her friends. Their aversion for each other increased. Her conduct, it is admitted, was, though cold and unattractive to him, irreproachably correct; but his, on the contrary, was undeniably irregular and licentious. Notwithstanding the efforts of Wilkes's father to reconcile them, they resolved on living apart, the wife's inclination to this course being encouraged by her mother. A deed of separation was accordingly drawn up, by which Wilkes agreed to permit his wife to live with her relations, allowing her

two hundred a-year; a sum totally disproportionate to the fortune which he received from her.

He was now at liberty to indulge his propensities for gay society, and spent much of his time at the Dilletanti Club in Palace Yard, at the Beefsteak Club, and, above all, at Medmenham Abbey. This building, originally occupied by a body of Cistercian monks, is pleasantly situated on the left bank of the Thames, between Great Marlow and Henley, and surrounded by extensive gardens and groves of trees. It was rented by a company of twelve, consisting of Wilkes and those whom I have previously named as his associates, with some others, for the celebration of rites similar, in the worship of Momus, to those which were afterwards practised by Byron and his friends at Newstead, but with far greater devotion to the deities of Idalia and Lampsacus. The company called themselves Franciscans, either from Sir Francis Dashwood, whom they placed at their head, or from Sir Francis Duffield, the proprietor of the Abbey, who was also one of the fraternity. Paul Whitehead, whom they nicknamed "Paul the aged," was their secretary and steward. John Hall Stevenson, too, was one of the set, and Sterne, it was believed, had been admitted to their diversions. One of their amusements was a mock celebration of the sacraments and other rites of the Christian Church: the Eucharist they used to administer to an ape. Whoever would have a notion of their other sports, may look into 'The Foundling Hospital for Wit,' where it may be seen that their orgies rivalled those of Pope Alexander VI., or those of Tiberius supping with Gallus or luxuriating at Capreæ.

Over the main entrance was placed the motto from Rabelais, *Fay ce que voudras*; and the licence permitted by it was thoroughly practised. Inscriptions and figures of Priapean character met the eye at every turn. Not the faintest show of decency revealed itself, unless it were in the statues of Harpocrates and Angerona, placed at the extremities of the refectory, intimating that both male and female were to be silent to those without regarding the freaks played within.

Wilkes, while he thus disported himself with the Medmenham crew, affected to despise the abilities of the whole of them, except Dashwood and Potter.

He still retained his desire to get into Parliament; and as Potter, the member for Aylesbury, being appointed in June 1757 one of the vice-treasurers of Ireland, vacated his seat, a private agreement was made between him and Wilkes, on what terms is not known, that if he could obtain a seat for any other place, he should endeavour to secure Wilkes's election for Aylesbury. Wilkes having property near Aylesbury was in a favourable condition for success; and the result was that, as Potter was chosen for Oakhampton, Wilkes came in for Aylesbury, but found himself, at the conclusion of the affair, a loser of seven thousand pounds, some portion of which had doubtless gone into the possession of Potter. Potter, being himself in difficulties, and involved in transactions with the Jews, introduced Wilkes also to those usurers, and gave him, as Wilkes himself said, "the worst advice."* Finding his incumbrances increase, he attempted, much to his dishonour, but in perfect consistency with his charac-

* Almon's Correspondence and Memoir of Wilkes, vol. ii. p. 55.

ter, to deprive his wife of her annuity. He wrote to her to resign it, but received a refusal; he requested an interview with her, but this was also refused; he then went to law, hoping to annul the deed of separation, and caused Mrs Mead, by a writ of *habeas corpus*, to bring her daughter before the Court of King's Bench. In the evidence it appeared that Wilkes, after "using his wife very ill," had consented, in consideration of a great sum which she had given him out of her separate estate, to her living alone, and had covenanted, under a large penalty, never to disturb her; and that she considered the writ of *habeas corpus* was procured with a view of seizing her by force, or for some other bad purpose. The Court decided that the husband had made by the deed a formal renunciation of all right over the wife, and that any attempt to molest her, whether in leaving the Court, or on any other occasion, would be a breach of the peace. This attempt to defraud Mrs Wilkes ended all communication between her and her husband. He paid her annuity, and allowed her daughter to visit her, but seems never again to have been admitted to her presence.

His membership for Aylesbury brought him under the notice of Earl Temple, who had just been appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, and who was anxious to secure the establishment of the militia, a measure recently introduced, and not popular in the country. To him Wilkes paid his court by promoting the scheme, and a regiment was at length raised, of which Sir Francis Dashwood was made colonel, and Wilkes lieutenant-colonel. On the 29th of May 1762, Sir Francis, on being appointed Chancellor of the Ex-

chequer, resigned his colonelship, and Wilkes, partly by his recommendation, was elected colonel.

In January of that year, the Ministry, with Lord Bute at their head, had found it necessary to declare war against Spain, and laid before Parliament the papers relative to the subject; and Wilkes, bent on making a noise, then published his first political essay, which he entitled, 'Observations on the Papers relative to the Rupture with Spain,' charging the Ministry with folly, cowardice, and imbecility in not having declared war sooner.

On the 5th of June following, he commenced the 'North Briton,' in opposition to the 'Briton,' a paper which Smollett conducted on behalf of Lord Bute. Lord Bute had started this paper in his support on the very day that he placed himself at the head of the Treasury, showing his apprehensions by setting up an organ of defence before he had done anything to be attacked. Smollett conducted the paper with great scurrility; and it was supported by another paper called the 'Auditor,' written in a similar spirit by Arthur Murphy. The 'North Briton' was intended originally to satirise Lord Bute, as having too much influence with George III., his mother, and the Ministry, by ironical commendations of his lordship and the Scotch. But the intention was not well preserved, for the authors, who were to write as Scotchmen, wrote often more like Englishmen. It was while the militia colonel was conducting this paper that he had the carouse at the mess-table with Gibbon, which is so effectively chronicled in Gibbon's Journal, under the date of September 23, 1762:—

"Colonel Wilkes, of the Buckinghamshire Militia,

dined with us and renewed the acquaintance Sir Thomas [Worsley] and myself had begun with him at Reading. I scarcely ever met with a better companion; he has inexhaustible spirits, infinite wit and humour, and a great deal of knowledge; *but* [*is*] *a thorough profligate in principle as in practice, his life stained with every vice, and his conversation full of blasphemy and indecency. These morals he glories in; for shame is a weakness he has long since surmounted. He told us himself that in this time of public dissension he was resolved to make his fortune. Upon this noble principle he has connected himself closely with Lord Temple and Mr Pitt, and commenced a public adversary to Lord Bute, whom he abuses weekly in the 'North Briton' and other political papers in which he is concerned.* This proved a very debauched day; we drank a good deal both after dinner and supper; and when at last Wilkes had retired, Sir Thomas and some others (of whom I was not one) broke into his room, and made him drink a bottle of claret in bed."

This profligate and shameless pretender to patriotism, as Gibbon describes him, had been elected to Parliament, we have seen, in 1757. At the death of George II., in 1760, the Parliament, according to usage, ought to have been dissolved; but it was agreed among the leading members that it would be more convenient for the transaction of public business to allow it to exist till the following year. Wilkes, anxious to secure his re-election, paid great attention to his constituents at Aylesbury, both by hospitality to the better sort, and by such other gratifications to the lower class as they were accustomed to expect. He thus sunk himself

deeper and deeper in pecuniary difficulties; and he remarked that he would never advise any gentleman to represent the town in which he resided, for his constituents would be a heavy tax on his table and his cellar. In consequence of his embarrassments, accordingly, he had begun to think of relinquishing his contemplated career of patriotism in England, and of soliciting some political appointment abroad. Sir James Porter, the Minister at Constantinople, had recently desired to be recalled; Wilkes, through Mr Legge, applied to the Duke of Newcastle for the post; but Pitt and Lord Temple secured it for their brother, Henry Grenville. Soon after, he asked, through Lord Temple, for the governorship of Canada; but it was given to Mr Murray, then resident at Venice. For two or three years afterwards he continued to direct his looks towards those quarters, but no help came to him from thence.

In the meanwhile the 'North Briton' was continuing its course. Lord Bute was not the only object of its satire. Johnson, while he is quoted to prove that "a favourite" is "a mean wretch, whose whole business is by any means to please," is sneered at for having become a pensioner, after having defined pension to mean "pay given to a state hireling for treason to his country," and a pensioner to be "a slave of state, hired by a stipend to obey his master;" and wonder is expressed that so much of the public money should have been bestowed on the author of 'London,' and accepted by him. Hogarth is attacked throughout a whole number on account of his print of "The Times," as having foolishly left his own peculiar walk, and intruded himself

on political ground; where he is quite at a loss how to maintain a standing. Yet Hogarth, says Wilkes, might well succeed in satire, as he can effectively show the offensive side of objects, though he fails utterly in portraying what is *fair and attractive.* He "misses no flaw in any production of nature or art," but "never catches a single idea of beauty, grace, or elegance." When "Marriage à-la-mode" had been published, he wished, on the suggestion of the publisher, to produce a series of prints representing a happy marriage; but "the rancour and malevolence of his mind made him very soon turn with envy and disgust from objects of so pleasing contemplation." His favourite "Sigismunda," the labour of so many years, is not human. But his genius is in its decay. The voyage of his little light bark, which he has steered under the influence of gain and vanity, must soon come to an end.

Wilkes had introduced himself to Churchill, and as they were similarly disposed in politics, and Churchill had little more of moral principle than Wilkes, they soon became intimate. Churchill had brought himself into notice the preceding year by his satire on the players, and, being equally ready to satirise any other person or thing (for in satire only did he show literary power), was easily induced by Wilkes to assist him in railing in the pages of the 'North Briton.' Henceforth Wilkes and Churchill could hardly find terms sufficiently encomiastic in which to extol one another. Churchill, in his verse, sets Wilkes as a patriot on a level with Algernon Sidney; Wilkes, in the 'North Briton,' represents Churchill as "a manly genius," to whom "the literary world is indebted for some of the most noble productions of our age and language, which

will live and be admired by posterity after all our short-lived political offspring have perished." Churchill's satire, however, was less effective in prose than in verse. One of his papers, a satire on the Scotch intended for the 'North Briton,' he recalled, and amplified it into the 'The Prophecy of Famine,' a tumid performance, which yet had influence enough to bring on him the enmity of a whole nation. The unhappy Charles Lloyd, who had been a chum of Churchill's at Westminster School, furnished a small quantity of very mediocre verse.

Some of Wilkes's sarcastic remarks, published in the thirteenth number, on the 12th of August 1762, referring to the recent coronation of the King and Queen, drew on him the wrath of Earl Talbot, the Lord High Steward. Speaking of pensions, the 'North Briton' said: "Every species of elegance and refinement in the polite arts may, I think, without censure, be rewarded with a pension. A politeness equal to that of Lord Talbot's *horse* ought not to pass unnoticed. At the coronation he paid a new, and, for a *horse*, singular respect to his sovereign. I appeal to applauding multitudes (who were so charmed as to forget every rule of decency, and to clap even in the royal presence), whether *his* or *his lord's* dexterity on that day did not surpass any courtier's. Caligula's *horse* had not half this merit. We know how nobly *he* was provided for. What the exact proportion of merit was between his *lordship* and his *horse*, and how far the pension should be divided between them, I will not take upon me to determine. . . . In my private opinion, however, the merit of both was very great, and neither ought to pass unnoticed. . . . Some of the regulations of

the courtiers themselves for that day had long been settled by former lord stewards. It was reserved for Lord Talbot to settle an etiquette for their horses."

Such observations, designed to make Lord Talbot ridiculous, drew from his lordship a letter to Wilkes asking whether he was the author of the paper. Wilkes replied that, before he answered that inquiry, he must understand what right his lordship had to question him about the authorship of an anonymous production; but that, if he could not otherwise satisfy his lordship, he should always be ready to give him the satisfaction becoming a gentleman. Lord Talbot rejoined that he could not conceive why, if he did not write the paper, he should be disinclined to disown it; that he had questioned him because he had himself declared, in the hearing of men of credit, that he had occasionally assisted in the 'North Briton,' and that if he did not deny the paper, he must conclude he wrote it. This skirmishing correspondence led to a meeting with pistols at Bagshot, in which Lord Talbot was attended by Colonel Berkeley, afterwards Lord Bottetourt—and Wilkes, who was just come from a debauch at Medmenham, by a Mr Harris. Lord Talbot, in a preliminary interview with Wilkes, which Wilkes solicited, exclaimed, in a violent passion, that he was not accustomed to be injured or insulted; but would Wilkes own the paper or deny it? Wilkes answered that he would at that moment do neither, but that he would fight, if his lordship were so inclined, and, if he survived, would then declare the truth—proposing, at the same time, that they should fight in the room with the door locked, that there might be no possibility of

interruption. Lord Talbot retorted that this would be mere butchery; that Wilkes was a murderer, and wanted to kill him, though he had never in the least offended Wilkes. Then, becoming calmer, and expressing admiration of Wilkes's courage, he conversed a while with him and the seconds on indifferent subjects, till, growing excited again, he told Wilkes that he was an unbeliever, and wished to be killed. Wilkes smiled, and remarked that they were not met to settle articles of faith, but points of honour. At last it was arranged that they should fight in a garden adjoining the inn. Both fired together, but both without effect; and Wilkes walked up to Lord Talbot and told him that he acknowledged the paper. Lord Talbot paid him the highest encomiums on his courage, and told him that he would declare everywhere that he was the noblest fellow God ever made; and the matter ended in the principals and seconds supping together. This is Wilkes's own account of the affair in a letter to Lord Temple; but there is no reason for doubting its truth, for, besides that Wilkes did not want courage, he afterwards sent a copy of the letter to the 'Political Register,' and would hardly have published a misrepresentation which there were witnesses to contradict. But as to Wilkes's part in the proceeding, it is very well observed by the author of Wilkes's Life, prefixed to the 'Letters to his Daughter,' that when he had driven, by ridicule and contumacy, an opponent into a challenge, it would have been but a proper mark of generosity to have withheld his fire. He was at liberty to expose his own life to Lord Talbot by his obstinacy, but he had no right to aim at Lord Talbot's.

CHAPTER II.

Wilkes dedicates the 'Fall of Mortimer' to Lord Bute—Publishes No. XLV. of the 'North Briton'—Character of it—General warrant issued for the apprehension of all concerned in it—Wilkes arrested—His papers seized—Refuses to answer questions—Is sent to the Tower—Is brought before the Court of Common Pleas—Is remanded to the Tower—Deprived of his colonelcy—Chief-Justice Pratt decides that his commitment, as he was a member of Parliament, must be deemed invalid—His impudent letter to the Secretaries of State—Actions against the Secretaries of State and others for illegal apprehensions—Results of them—Wilkes reprints the 'North Briton,' and publishes the 'Essay on Woman'—Is challenged in Paris by a Captain Forbes—Meeting of Parliament—His Majesty's message about Wilkes—Parliament orders No. XLV. to be burnt as a libel—Wilkes's duel with Martin—Complaint of him by Bishop Warburton in the House of Lords—Is ordered to attend in Parliament to answer the charges against him—Declines to comply, pleading illness—Goes off to Paris.

In the year 1763 Wilkes published an edition of Ben Jonson's 'Fall of Mortimer,' for the purpose of prefixing to it a sarcastic dedication to the Earl of Bute, intimating that George III. was held in no less subjection by Bute and the Princess-Dowager of Wales, with whom slander declared Bute to be too intimate, than Edward II. had been by Queen Isabella and her minion, Roger Mortimer, an upstart who "excluded the first nobles of England from the King's councils, and disposed of all places of profit and trust," and, though the young King had been victorious over the Scots, "hastily concluded with that nation, on his own

responsibility, and from personal motives of power and ambition, an ignominious peace, by which he sacrificed the justest claims of conquest." The irony in this dedication is one of Wilkes's most ingenious displays. Other Scotchmen besides Bute receive a portion of the dedicator's satire, as Gilbert Elliot, Alexander Wedderburne, the author of 'Douglas,' and Mallet, *alias* Malloch. Arthur Murphy, too, is attacked as the supporter of Lord Bute in the paper called the 'Auditor.' Lord Bute, it is remarked, was fond of private theatricals, and on the occasion of his appearing as Lothario at the Duchess of Queensberry's, Frederick, Prince of Wales, exclaimed, "In this character Bute does *not* act." He is entreated by Wilkes to join with Murphy in "perfecting the weak scenes" of Ben Jonson's tragedy, and making the play complete; for, adds Wilkes, "it is the warmest wish of my heart that the Earl of Bute may speedily complete the story of Roger Mortimer."

As the 'North Briton' was established expressly with the object of assailing Lord Bute and his Administration, it might have been expected to cease when Lord Bute resigned and the Administration was changed. The last number but one, the forty-fourth, was published on the 2d of April 1763, and Lord Bute resigned on the 8th of that month. Wilkes then went over to Paris with his daughter, and it is thought that the 'North Briton' would possibly have been altogether dropped, had it not been for an accident which gave rise to the notorious No. XLV. Mr Grenville having succeeded Lord Bute, sent his brother, Earl Temple, apparently as a compliment, a copy of the King's speech,

which was to be delivered on the following day, the 19th of April. Pitt, afterwards Earl of Chatham, was present when the letter containing the copy was received, and both of them expressed great displeasure at the speech, especially the passage relating to the King of Prussia. During the discussion, Wilkes, who had just returned from Paris, happened to call on Lord Temple, and being admitted, heard many of the remarks, which, when he returned home, he committed to paper; and from them, with some additions of his own, he manufactured No. XLV., which was published April 23d.

Much of the matter, and many of the expressions, in this famous production, were such as could hardly be allowed to pass without strong animadversion. The speech itself is pronounced to be "the most abandoned instance of Ministerial effrontery ever attempted to be imposed on mankind." "I am in doubt," says the writer, "whether the imposition is greater on the sovereign or on the nation. Every friend of his country must lament that a prince of so many great and amiable qualities can be brought to give the sanction of his sacred name to the most odious measures and the most unjustifiable public declarations." As to the paragraph respecting the King of Prussia, in which the King of England is made to say that "the powers at war with his good brother have been induced to agree to such terms of accommodation as that great prince has approved," the 'North Briton' declares that the 'infamous fallacy of this whole sentence is apparent to all mankind; for it is known that the King of Prussia did not barely *approve*, but absolutely *dictated*, as

conqueror, every article of the terms of peace." The speech speaks of the *spirit of concord* spreading through the land; but the 'North Briton' asserts that the tax upon cider, which had just been imposed, and which rendered private houses liable to search, must excite *a spirit of discord*, and *a spirit of liberty* to resist oppression; resistance "warranted by the spirit of the English Constitution." The Administration are termed "a weak, disjointed, incapable set; I will call them," says the writer, "anything but Ministers—by whom the favourite still meditates to rule this kingdom with a rod of iron."

Upon this abusive tirade the Ministry immediately took the opinions of the Attorney and Solicitor General, Mr Charles Yorke, and Sir Fletcher Norton, who replied that the paper was in their judgment "an infamous and seditious libel, tending to inflame the minds and alienate the affections of the people from his Majesty, and excite them to traitorous insurrections against his Government." It was resolved to prosecute the authors, printers, and publishers of the paper. Lord Halifax, one of the Secretaries of State for the Home Department, issued what was called a general warrant, authorising four of his Majesty's messengers in ordinary, with the aid of a constable, to apprehend, and bring before the Secretary of State, the authors, printers, and publishers of the 'North Briton,' No. XLV., and to seize their papers; but mentioning no one by name except Kearsley, the printer. The first person that they seized, however, was not Kearsley, but Leech, apprehending him and his journeymen and servants, though there was no ground for suspecting him of con-

nection with the paper except that Wilkes had been seen going into his house. When Kearsley, who, though a printer, was only the publisher of the 'North Briton,' was at last seized, he stated that he knew nothing of the author, but that Wilkes gave orders for the printing, and that Churchill received the profits from the sale. Balfe, the real printer, was then apprehended, being the forty-eighth person taken into custody under this general warrant. On his evidence, and that of Kearsley, and with the sanction of the Solicitors to the Treasury, Lord Egremont, the other Secretary of State, authorised the messengers to seize the person and papers of Wilkes on the same warrant, directing them, if necessary, to enter his house even at midnight for that purpose. Wilkes, going out early the next morning, was arrested by one of the messengers, on his return, at his own door, and asking to see the warrant, and not finding his name in it, declared that he would yield no obedience to it, but that if the messenger attempted to enforce it, he would kill him in the street. He then opened his door, and the four messengers followed him in. Just at that moment Almon the bookseller called on him, whom he privately requested to acquaint Lord Temple with the affair. Lord Temple, on receiving this information, desired his attorney to apply to the Court of Common Pleas for a writ of *habeas corpus* to bring Wilkes before the Court.

In the mean time, the four messengers, with constables and assistants to the number of thirteen in all, put Wilkes into a chair, and carried him to Lord Halifax's house, which was in the same street with Wilkes's. Lord Halifax had previously sent several civil messages

to Wilkes to request him to come; but Wilkes replied that he had not the honour of his lordship's acquaintance. Finding resistance useless, however, he thought fit to comply peaceably. As soon as he arrived, the messengers were ordered to return to his house and seize his papers; an order which was executed by them in the presence of Robert Wood, the Under-Secretary of State, and Webb, the Treasury Solicitor. Lord Temple and several other gentlemen, who had come to see Wilkes, also witnessed the transaction. The officers opened his bureau and drawers, and put his papers into a sack, at the mouth of which lay his will and his pocket-book. The writ of *habeas corpus* was evaded by the transference of Wilkes to different messengers, so that those to whom the writ was addressed, two of the four who apprehended Wilkes, might say that they had him not in custody.

Wilkes, being examined by Lords Egremont and Halifax, and refusing to answer their questions, or to say anything that would criminate either himself or any one else—professing himself a warm friend to the house of Brunswick, but expressing his belief that "no prince had ever the misfortune of being served by such ignorant, insolent, and despotic Ministers"—was committed to the Tower, with orders that he should be kept in close custody, and that no one should be allowed to visit him. As he was taken off, he sarcastically observed to Lord Egremont that he should prefer occupying the apartments in which his lordship's father had been confined when committed for high treason. No other favour would he ask, he said, except that he might not be put where a Scotchman had been,

lest he should be infected with the Scotch disease. Being permitted to write to his daughter, then in Paris, provided that he left his letter open for inspection, he sent her congratulations on being in a free country.*

All this took place on the 30th of April. On the 2d of May the Court of Common Pleas called for a return to their writ of *habeas corpus;* and not receiving any satisfactory return, directed another writ to the Constable of the Tower.

On the 3d of May, in consequence, Wilkes was brought to the bar of that Court. He made a speech to the judges, in which, without acknowledging himself the author of No. XLV. of the 'North Briton,' he observed, in defence of the paper, that it removed all the blame of political miscarriages from the shoulders of a prince who was to be loved and honoured as the defender of the cause of liberty, to those of a Ministry who were to be regarded as unreasoning despots. As to himself, he said, he could show himself proof alike against corruption and persecution. Sergeant Glynn, who seems to have been glad of the opportunity to act as his counsel, argued that his commitment was not valid. This question the Court took time to consider, and adjourned to the 6th of May, remanding Wilkes in the meanwhile to the Tower, but relaxing the close custody in which he had previously been kept. As he left the hall, a mob saluted him with loud acclamations, and many, who thought him right in resisting the warrant, visited him at the Tower.

The Court adjourned to the 6th of May, and during the interval, Lord Egremont, by command of his Ma-

* Jesse's Memoirs of George III., vol. i. p. 192.

jesty, signified to Earl Temple, as lord-lieutenant of Buckinghamshire, that the King judged it improper that Wilkes should continue any longer to be colonel of the militia; and Lord Temple signified his Majesty's pleasure to him accordingly.

When Wilkes was again brought up before the Court of Common Pleas, the Lord Chief-Justice Pratt, afterwards Lord Camden, gave it as the opinion of the Court that, according to precedent, whenever, in a charge against a person, a nice combination of circumstances afforded ground for suspicion of facts, a magistrate was considered to be authorised to commit, even though he had received no particular information as to the charge, and that the commitment of Wilkes was, therefore, not to be deemed illegal; but that, as to the privilege of a member of Parliament, there were but three things that could affect it, treason, felony, and breach of the peace; and as the writing of a libel, of which Wilkes was accused, was no one of the three, though it might have a tendency to produce the last, it could not be thought sufficient to annul the privilege of Parliament, and Wilkes must accordingly be discharged. Wilkes said that he would not trouble the Court with his thanks, but that the whole English nation would thank them, as it would also thank his defender, Sergeant Glynn, who had so efficiently pleaded the cause of liberty. He was then followed to his house, with loud acclamations, by a huge mob of the lower orders, who thought proper to waste the evening in a display of bonfires and illuminations.

On the day of his discharge he wrote a short and impudent letter to the two Secretaries of State, in

which he said: "On my return, I find that my house has been robbed, and am informed that the stolen goods are in the hands of one or both of your lordships. I therefore insist that you forthwith return them." Sergeant Glynn saw the letter before it was sent, and approved of it; and, what was more surprising, it had the approbation of Lord Temple. Next morning he attempted to get a warrant at Bow Street for searching the Secretaries' houses, but the magistrate refused to oblige him. The Secretaries, in answer to his letter, noticed "the scurrilous and indecent expressions" in it, and told him that his papers had been seized because he was charged with being the author of "an infamous and seditious libel," for which libel, notwithstanding his discharge from the Tower, his Majesty had ordered his Attorney-General to prosecute him; adding, that such of his papers as did not tend to prove his guilt would be restored to him. As to the prosecution by the Attorney-General, Wilkes, when information was exhibited against him in the Court of King's Bench, stood out, and declined to appear, declaring that the serving him with the subpœna was another violation of the privileges of Parliament.*

Lord Temple, probably for taking part with Wilkes, was, on the 7th of May, removed from the lord-lieutenancy of Buckinghamshire, and Lord le Despenser, two days afterwards, was appointed in his room. It was then concerted between Lord Temple and Wilkes that actions should be brought against the Secretaries of State, the Under-Secretary Wood, the King's messengers, and the Solicitor to the Treasury, for having

* Almon, vol. ii. p. 3; North Briton, vol. iii. p. 29, 33.

illegally apprehended Wilkes, and many other persons, under the "general warrant." Lord Temple supplied the funds for commencing these actions—Wilkes's exchequer having been long at the lowest—but did not appear in the proceedings, each aggrieved individual acting for himself. The first plaintiff was one of the journeymen printers that had been taken into custody. He brought his action, on the 6th of July, against the King's messengers, and, as Chief-Justice Pratt left the matter free to the jury, obtained a verdict for £300 damages. All the other persons that had been similarly arrested also brought actions, and all recovered damages; but, in every one of the cases, the counsel for the Crown tendered a bill of exception against the verdict. The expenses thrown upon the State officers were defrayed by the Crown; and Lord North, at a subsequent period, acknowledged that these law proceedings had cost the Government more than £100,000.

Wilkes brought an action against Wood, the Under-Secretary of State, which was not tried till the 6th of December, when he obtained from the jury £1000 damages. Webb, the Solicitor to the Treasury, who was called as a witness on Wood's trial, swore that Wood, who was charged with having unlocked Wilkes's bureau and drawers, had no key in his hand at the time; but for this evidence he was indicted for perjury, and the jury deliberated long before they acquitted him; and before Wilkes's action against him came on for trial he died. Lord Egremont, too, Lord Halifax's colleague, died about the same time; if he had lived, it was Wilkes's intention to call him out for what he

termed his lordship's insolence to him. As for the action against Lord Halifax himself, his lordship evaded it by various legal artifices, and at length by standing out in contempt of court till Wilkes was outlawed, when he could plead that, as an outlaw, he could not maintain any action.*

For a time Wilkes had rather the advantage of his adversaries. We must look back a little to see how a scheme of his own, which, partly from spontaneous impulse, and partly on the persuasions of others, he soon after proceeded to carry into execution, put him into their power. He had imagined, and been encouraged to believe, that a new edition of the 'North Briton,' corrected and printed by himself, would have an extensive sale, and put a large sum of money into his pocket. He accordingly set up a press in his own house, and engaged several printers, for the purpose of reprinting the 'North Briton,' and printing some other matters, and thus gave the Government the means of obtaining that evidence against him which they might otherwise have failed to secure; for previously the Ministry had no proof that he was either the writer or editor of the 'North Briton.' Lord Temple denounced the proceeding as madness, and offered Wilkes, in the hearing of Almon, the bookseller, any sum of money if he would remove the press, but Wilkes would listen to no remonstrances.

As early as the month of May in this year, 1763, he engaged, with others, one Michael Curry, a printer from Norwich, to work at his private press, and boarded and lodged him in his own house. One of

* North Briton, vol. iii. p. 151.

the things which he employed him to print was an obscene poem called 'An Essay on Woman,' a doggerel parody on Pope's 'Essay on Man,' with notes to which Bishop Warburton's name was attached. This trash Curry was to print by himself in secret, allowing no other person whatever to see it. He was to work off only twelve copies, which were to be delivered into Wilkes's own hands. This injunction Curry did not observe, but worked off a thirteenth copy for his own gratification; and from his carelessness, as he afterwards stated, four pages of it fell into the hands of one Jennings, another of Wilkes's printers, who let it be shown to a Mr Farmer, a Mr Faden, and the Rev. Mr Kidgell, chaplain to Lord March. Farmer, finding that the rest of the poem was in the possession of Curry, made application to him for the whole, saying that he wanted it to oblige a Roman Catholic gentleman, and offering him two guineas for it. Curry refused to part with the copy; but went to Churchill the next day, and asked him whether any harm could come to Wilkes on account of the 'Essay on Woman;' Churchill replied that there could not. Soon after, he was asked by Faden to let the copy be shown to a nobleman, who was ready to give a large sum for it, and to give security to any amount that the copy should be returned. Faden intimated, at the same time, that there was a report that Wilkes intended to prosecute Curry for having stolen the copy of the Essay. Being thus pestered with promises and intimidations, he at last gave up the copy to Faden, who gave him five guineas as a security that he would return it, and took him the same evening to the house

of Webb, the Solicitor to the Treasury, where he found Kidgell. Webb told him to make himself easy, as the Government would take care of him if he would give evidence against Wilkes; and for several weeks afterwards he was boarded and lodged in Webb's house. When the proceedings against Wilkes came on, he was carried before the House of Lords to give evidence, and a few days subsequent was taken by Webb to Lord Sandwich, who told him that he had saved the nation, and that he might depend on anything that was in his power. Curry thanked his lordship for his good intentions, and, observing that he was then without money, was in consequence supplied, under the superintendence of Webb, by one of the King's messengers, named Carrington, with a guinea and a half a-week for five-and-twenty weeks. Webb then employed him to compromise the verdicts with the other printers who had been arrested under the general warrant, a commission which he effected for the sum of £120 for each; and received for his trouble £233, 6s. 8d. His affairs with Webb being thus brought to an end, and his life, like that of many informers, being rendered uneasy to him by his fellows, he quitted London.

At this press Wilkes printed accounts of the proceedings against him, and sold them at a guinea apiece. But growing weary of this business, he went off to Paris to see his daughter. There, as he was walking in the street with the Lord Palmerston of that day, he was met by a gentlemanly-looking person, who, asking if his name was Wilkes, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, said that as Mr Wilkes had slandered the nation in the

'North Briton,' he must fight him; declaring himself to be Captain John Forbes, a Scottish officer in the French service. Wilkes desired him to find a second, who might attest that he was what he represented himself to be. A time being appointed, Wilkes was ready with a second, but Forbes came without one. He nevertheless persisted in provoking Wilkes to fight, but Wilkes refused, unless he found a second. In the course of the day the military authorities at Paris got knowledge of the affair, and put Wilkes under arrest, but released him on his giving his parole not to break the peace in France. Two Scottish officers afterwards called on Wilkes, and disavowed, for themselves and their fraternity, all participation in Forbes's proceedings. Forbes hid himself and escaped to England, where, it is said, soon after his arrival, he received a letter from Lord Sandwich, then Secretary of State, desiring him to embark for Portugal, as he would be received into the Portuguese service; and this circumstance gave rise to a suspicion that Forbes had been incited by the Ministry, or by some influential member of it, to attack Wilkes.

When this affair was ended, he immediately resolved on returning to England to bring his case and his character before Parliament in November. Three days before Parliament met, he published another political paper, which he called No. XLVI. of the 'North Briton,' a tirade against three of the Ministers, to whom he said Lord Bute had delegated his omnipotent authority—Lord Holland, George Grenville, the imposer of the tax upon cider, and the Earl of Sandwich, the last of whom was particularly assailed, and declared to have divested

himself of every particle of virtue and honour, to have supported the meanest frauds by perjury and falsehood, and to have been studious to make his vices equal to his dulness and incapacity.

Parliament met on the 15th of November. It had been the custom of the House of Commons, at the first meeting of a session, to enter on the consideration of breaches of privileges, if any were brought under their notice, before all other matters. Wilkes rose to address the Speaker with a complaint of his privilege, as a member of the House, having been violated. But George Grenville, Chancellor of the Exchequer, was prepared with a message on the subject from his Majesty; and the usage of the House was at once set aside in order that his Majesty's communication might have the precedence. The message was to the effect that John Wilkes, having been apprehended for trial at the instance of his Majesty, as the author of a seditious and dangerous libel, had, on pleading his privilege as a member of Parliament, been discharged out of custody by the Court of Common Pleas; that, having been called upon by the Court of King's Bench, on information exhibited against him for the same offence, by his Majesty's Attorney-General, he had contumaciously declined to appear, again pleading his Parliamentary privilege; and that his Majesty in consequence, desiring to show all possible attention to the House of Commons, and thinking it of the utmost importance to prevent justice from being eluded, had directed the libel, and copies of the examinations and legal proceedings concerning John Wilkes, to be laid before the House for their consideration.

These papers being read, a motion was made that "the paper entitled the 'North Briton,' No. XLV., is a scandalous and seditious libel, containing expressions of the most unexampled insolence and contumely towards his Majesty, the grossest aspersions upon both Houses of Parliament, and the most audacious defiance of the authority of the whole Legislature; and most manifestly tending to alienate the affections of the people from his Majesty, to withdraw them from their obedience to the laws of the realm, and to excite them to traitorous insurrections against his Majesty's Government." Some members supported an amendment to omit the last clause; but the question whether it should be retained being put, the affirmation was carried by 273 against 111. No. XLV. of the 'North Briton' was then ordered by the House to be burnt by the common hangman.

Wilkes made a short speech, in which he detailed the treatment that he had received from the Secretary of State, representing it as grievous and unjust, and saying that he would submit his case to the judgment of the House, and that, if they should decide that he was entitled to privilege, he would then be ready to waive that privilege, and submit himself to a jury of his countrymen.

One of the speakers against Wilkes on the occasion was Samuel Martin, a secretary to the Treasury, who had been stigmatised, on the imputed suppression or perversion of some letter in the fortieth number of the 'North Briton,' published on the 5th of the preceding March, as "the most treacherous, base, selfish, mean, abject, low-lived, and dirty fellow, that ever wriggled

himself into a secretaryship." Wilkes had not then acknowledged his concern in the 'North Briton,' but was universally considered to be implicated in the conduct of it; and Martin appropriately observed, in the course of his speech, that the person who had written of him in that paper was "a malignant and infamous scoundrel, who had stabbed him in the dark." Next day Wilkes wrote to him that, as he had complained of being stabbed in the dark, though he was perhaps not so much in the dark as he affected to be, he would relieve him of every pretence of ignorance respecting his assailant, and inform him at once that the very passage in the 'North Briton' in which he had been named or alluded to was written by John Wilkes. Martin replied that, as Wilkes had made this confession, he would now say that Wilkes was "a malignant and infamous scoundrel," and would offer him an opportunity of showing whether he was also cowardly. The result was a meeting with pistols in Hyde Park, in which each fired two shots, and Martin's second ball lodged in Wilkes's flank, who, bleeding greatly, thought he was killed, and desired Martin to escape; an injunction which he would not obey till other people came up, to whose care Wilkes might be left. It should be observed, in justice to Wilkes, that he next day returned Martin his letter, that no evidence might appear against him; and insisted that, in case of his death, his relations should give Martin no trouble; but that Martin did not at the same time return Wilkes's letter, but kept it in his hands till the 10th of December. Remarks were also made on the length of time, above eight months, which Martin had

suffered to elapse between the appearance of the attack in the 'North Briton' and his own retort in the House of Commons, where he might be supposed to have begun a quarrel in expectation that members would interpose to stop it. It was also said, on the report of his neighbours in the country, that Martin had spent much of the intervening time in practising at a target;* and it was well known that he proposed pistols to Wilkes, though Wilkes, as the party challenged, should have had the choice of weapons. But, regarding Wilkes as "an infamous scoundrel," he may have deemed it unnecessary to be scrupulous about the means of suppressing him.

On the 23d of November, while Wilkes was lying ill of his wound at home, a motion was made in the House of Commons, that "the privilege of Parliament does not extend to the case of writing and publishing seditious libels, nor ought to be allowed to obstruct the ordinary course of the laws in the speedy and effectual prosecution of so heinous and dangerous an offence;" a motion which was carried by 258 against 133.

In the House of Lords, at the same time, Bishop Warburton, whom Lord Sandwich had roused by showing him the 'Essay on Woman,' made a complaint of breach of privilege on account of his name being attached to its indecent notes; the whole being of such a nature, he said, that it would be injustice to the devil himself to suppose him capable of writing it. Lord Sandwich, though he had been talking loosely with Wilkes, not many days before, at a free-and-

* Walpole's Reign of George III., vol. i. p. 317; Jesse's Memoirs of George III., vol. i. p. 214.

easy club, and had been an associate with him at Medmenham, seconded Warburton by descanting on the enormity of the offence; and Lord le Despenser, while listening to him, observed that he had never before heard the devil preach against sin. It was during the discussion on this subject that Lord Chatham, then Mr Pitt, called Wilkes a blasphemer of his God and a reviler of his King; terms so just and applicable that Wilkes never forgave them, but continued a bitter enemy to Lord Chatham till his lordship's death.

The Commons, having passed their resolution, desired a conference with the Lords upon the matter; and a conference being granted, the Upper House agreed in the resolution of the Lower, and both ordered that No. XLV. should be sent to the sheriffs of London, to be burnt by the hands of the common hangman. A few days after, accordingly, the order was executed, under the superintendence of Mr Sheriff Harley, in front of the Royal Exchange. The partisans of Wilkes said that the copy was rescued from the flames by the mob with the loss of a corner only. A jack-boot and a petticoat, too, were thrown into the flames, in ridicule of the alleged connection between Lord Bute and the Princess-Dowager. However, the Ministerial abhorrence of such productions was amply shown. If the sheriff's chariot, and even the sheriff himself, was, as it was said, spattered with mud, he was recompensed with the thanks of the House of Commons for his vigour and firmness in carrying the order into execution in spite of the attempted obstruction of a riotous and insolent populace.

On the 1st of December, it was resolved by Parliament that, as there was evidence ready to be produced

that Mr Wilkes, named in the examinations laid before the House respecting No. XLV. of the 'North Briton,' was the real author and publisher of that paper, but that he was said to be unable to attend in the House from ill health, he should be ordered to appear on the 8th of December, if his health should then permit, and answer to the charge against him. As it was certified, on medical testimony, that he was still ill on that day, the order for his attendance was postponed for another week.

A few days afterwards Wilkes was subjected to a visitation, similar to that of Captain Forbes at Paris, from a Scotchman, who called himself an officer, and signed himself, in a letter in which he solicited an interview with Wilkes, Alexander Dun. As he was subsequently heard to declare, at a neighbouring coffee-house, that he and ten more were resolved to cut off Mr Wilkes, let it cost them what it would, for having written against Scotland, Wilkes was put on his guard; and the man being admitted into Wilkes's house, two of Wilkes's friends seized and searched him, but found no offensive weapon on him except a penknife. Wilkes procured a warrant for his apprehension, but no action was taken upon it. He appeared to be half insane; but Wilkes was not again molested by him.

Wilkes had put himself, for the cure of his wound, under the care of Dr Brocklesby and Mr Graves. On the 16th of December, as it was suspected that his inability to appear was but pretended, a motion was made and carried in the House of Commons, that, in addition to those two gentlemen, Dr Heberden and Mr Cæsar Hawkins should attend him on the part of the

House from time to time to watch the progress of his cure; and that those four gentlemen should be called before the House on the 19th day of the following January, to report upon his case, if he should still profess himself unable to attend in his place. Wilkes received the order, as communicated to him by Dr Brocklesby, with levity and sarcasm, animadverting on the superfluous anxiety of the House of Commons regarding his health; observing that he ought to take their appointment of a physician and surgeon to attend him the more kindly, as they appeared, in paying him this compliment, to have exceeded their legal powers; but remarking that, when they appointed those gentlemen to visit him, they forgot to desire him to receive them; and that, even if they had desired him, he certainly should not comply with their wishes. Thus the matter ended.

During the adjournment of the House at Christmas, Wilkes, finding himself something better, went off, though still at the cost of much suffering, to Paris, ostensibly to visit his daughter, but in reality to escape annoyance on account of his debts.*

* Life of Wilkes prefixed to the Letters to his Daughter, vol. i. p. 42.

CHAPTER III.

Wilkes meets with Martin in Paris—Sends a medical certificate to the Speaker of the House of Commons of his inability to attend—Genuineness of the certificate questioned—Witnesses heard at the bar of the House against Wilkes in his absence, and Wilkes expelled from the House—His complaints of breach of privilege against the King's messengers discharged—Debate on the legality of general warrants, adjourned for four months—Remarks on the proceedings—Wilkes's despondency as to his finances and prospects—His library and plate sold—Is outlawed—His extraordinary professions of sorrow on the death of Churchill—Proposes to write a history of England, and to edit Churchill's Works—Subscriptions from the Rockingham party enable him to take a cottage near Naples—Hints his desire of a place or a pension—Threatens to harass the Ministry if something is not done for him—Returns in desperation to London—Lord Rockingham sends him off with another small supply of money—His fresh hopes when the Duke of Grafton becomes Minister—His disappointment and rage—His second letter to the Duke of Grafton, reproaching his Grace and the Earl of Chatham—Effect of the letter on the populace—Wilkes's pecuniary resources exhausted—Returns again to London, and writes to the King entreating his clemency.

MARTIN, who was also in Paris, whither he had fled in consequence of the duel, sent to inquire about his health, and took the opportunity of assuring Wilkes that it was not his fault that Wilkes's note was not returned to him, as he had intrusted it to Mr Bradshaw, a friend of his, to deliver it; and added that, to prevent any suspicion of his appearing in the House of Commons against Wilkes, he should not present himself there till all affairs respecting him should be

settled. Soon afterwards, as Wilkes's wound, according to his statement, became extremely painful and inflamed, and was attended with fever, he sent a notice, dated January 11, to the Speaker of the House of Commons, that he should be unable to attend in Parliament on the 19th for the purpose of "vindicating the sacred rights of the Commons of Great Britain," and begged that a more distant day for the consideration of his case might be appointed. This notice was accompanied with a certificate from one of the French King's physicians, and a surgeon in the French army, stating that he would be incapable for some time of removing from Paris. This notice and certificate the Speaker communicated to the House when it assembled on the 19th, but observed that the certificate was not authenticated before a notary public, nor were the signatures to it in any way verified. A motion was then made to the effect that John Wilkes, Esq., a member of this House, having been repeatedly required to attend in his place to answer the charge of being the author and publisher of the 'North Briton' No. XLV., having been from time to time excused from attendance on account of ill health; having refused to receive the physician and surgeon appointed by the House to report on his condition; and having, moreover, withdrawn himself into a foreign country without assigning to the House a sufficient cause, is guilty of contempt of the authority of Parliament, and that the House will no longer delay to hear evidence on the said charge. This motion was carried by a majority of 275 to 70. Several of the persons who had been desired to attend at the House on that day were then examined at the bar in support

of the charge. Three attempts were made by the party that favoured Wilkes to have the matter adjourned, but were defeated, after three divisions, by overwhelming majorities. The witnesses continued to be heard till past four on Friday morning, when it was resolved, on the evidence which had been produced, that John Wilkes, Esq., was guilty of publishing the false, scandalous, and seditious libel, No. XLV. of the 'North Briton,' a production tending to do the greatest mischief to the Government and the nation; and that the said John Wilkes, Esq., should for that offence be expelled from the House. On the same day, a writ was issued for electing a new member for Aylesbury in his stead.

Being informed that his medical certificate, unattested, had been deemed insufficient, he sent the Speaker another with proper attestations, with a letter, in which he observed that he did not think such attestations had been necessary among gentlemen; and added, in his usual strain of tirade, that he was sure "the faithful historian's page would do justice to the uprightness of his intentions, to his ardent love of the constitution of our happy island, and to his honest efforts in the cause of liberty."

Wilkes's complaint of breach of privilege against Robert Wood, the solicitor Webb, and the King's messengers, which he had made on the 15th of November in the preceding year, and of which the consideration had been postponed from time to time, was brought under the attention of the House on Monday the 13th of February, and after a long hearing was adjourned to the following day; and the House, having continued to sit till half-past seven on Wednesday

morning, ordered that the complaints against all those persons be discharged.

The grand question was then to be decided, which had been proposed at the commencement of the debate, but had been adjourned—namely, whether a general warrant for apprehending the authors, printers, and publishers of a libel, with their papers, is warranted by law; and the consideration of this question was brought forward on Friday, February 17, 1764. The motion made upon it, which found numerous supporters, assumed, after several amendments, the following form: "That a general warrant for apprehending and seizing the authors, printers, and publishers of a seditious and treasonable libel, together with their papers, is not warranted by law, although such warrant hath been issued according to the usage of office, and hath been frequently produced to; and, so far as appears to this House, the validity thereof hath never been debated in the Court of King's Bench, but the parties thereupon have been frequently bailed by the said Court." Upon this motion there was much debating, which ended in another motion being made that the debate be adjourned for four months—a motion which was carried by 232 votes to 218. Thus Parliament got rid of the question, and discreetly freed itself from the necessity of declaring a general warrant illegal; and a mischievous demagogue, by freeing the nation from such an evil, produced good which he had not intended, serving others when he thought only of serving himself.

From the acrimonious feelings manifested, both in speaking and writing, by the weaker party in all these

proceedings, it might have seemed, said the author of a pamphlet called 'The Defence of the Majority,' "as if seditious libels were considered by the gentlemen of the minority as a sort of harmless sport, a mere exercise of wit and talents, and an innocent exertion of the liberty of the press (p. 10). Or it might have been supposed, he remarks, "that some innocent man had been oppressed by arbitrary violence, tyranny, and persecution. This indeed," he continues, "might justify the language that has been held, and the spirit which has been endeavoured to be infused into the action. What will they find as the object of so much alarm and jealousy? An Administration vindicating the dignity of the Crown, the authority of Parliament, and the general peace and good order of the State; not innovating, not proceeding with haste or violence, but submitting their judgments to the practice of their predecessors in office, exerting such powers only as had been established by repeated usage, which had frequently appeared before courts of judicature, and had never been questioned in them, but by the practice of those courts had been acknowledged and confirmed."—P. 38.

Some letters which Wilkes wrote to Humphry Cotes, an attorney who had acted for him in some legal transactions, and to whom he expresses himself very freely about his affairs, show us pretty clearly what were his circumstances and his views, his hopes and his prospects, during the term of his forced stay in a foreign country. Writing on the 20th of January 1764, when he had no doubt of being expelled from the House of Commons, he asks what he is to do. Out of Parlia-

ment, he says, he can never be sufficiently informed of public affairs to maintain any influence as a public man. If he is found guilty of the publication of No. XLV. and the Essay, he must stay abroad, for "no man in his senses would stand Mansfield's sentence on the publisher of a paper declared by both Houses of Parliament scandalous and seditious." Or, if he returns home to stand his trial, and then retires, he must by so doing confess himself indefensible. Philipps, indeed, another attorney, invites him, he says, to return, but will never persuade him that he can return without risk, for he is well aware of the fickleness of the people. "With all the fine things said and wrote of me," he observes, "have not the public to this moment left me in the lurch as to the expense of so great a variety of law-suits? I will serve them to the last moment of my life; but I will make use of the understanding God has given me, and will owe neither my security nor indemnity to them." As to the higher class, he can trust none of them except Lord Temple, "who is really a superior being," and whom he almost adores." "I may now, then," he proceeds, having secured to Englishmen their liberty and property, "fall back, after all their huzzas, into the mass of common citizens. . . . I know that many of the Opposition are, to the full, as much embarrassed about my business as the Administration, and detest it as much. I believe most parties will rejoice at my being here." The King, he thinks, cannot recede; and the Princess-Dowager can never forgive him. "What, then, am I to expect if I return to England? Persecution from my enemies; coldness and neglect from my friends." His finances,

he laments, have been much hurt by the expenses of elections at Berwick and Aylesbury; and his daughter's education is expensive. He can live much cheaper in Paris than in London. Perhaps, in the course of time, some event, public or private, may happen to assist him; his mother-in-law, or some other relative, may die; and "a lucky death often sets all right." Or, he continues, "if Government means peace or friendship with me, and to save their honour (wounded to the quick by Webb's affair), I then breathe no longer hostility. And, between ourselves, if they would send me ambassador to Constantinople, it is all I should wish. Mr Grenville, I am told, solicits his recall. I think, however, the King can never be brought to this (as to me I mean), though the Ministry would wish it." In the mean time he commissions Cotes to sell his plate and his library, and everything, as he may judge best. He is anxious to have everything settled in anticipation of outlawry. He signs a trust-deed, which he sends to Cotes, giving all his property to his daughter. He regards himself as an exile for life. Some time afterwards he again speaks of great debts, and of Cotes having declared his affairs desperate. But, as he has acted "a great and noble part for the public," so in private life he will "act a fair and honest part," and leave the rest to Providence. As to real friends, except Cotes himself, "a truly noble peer," "the first poet in the world," and one or two besides, he has none. He has been too honest and too disinterested to have more.

On the 21st of February proceedings had been commenced against him in the Court of King's Bench for

republishing No. XLV. of the 'North Briton,' and for printing and publishing the 'Essay on Woman;' and being found guilty, and not appearing when called to receive judgment, he was soon after outlawed.

He continued abroad, and was to meet Cotes and Churchill at Boulogne in October; but as he was not exact to his appointment, Churchill had gone to Boulogne and died there on the 5th of November, before Wilkes reached the place. By his will he left Wilkes his poems to edit with notes. This charge Wilkes declares he will execute to the best of his poor abilities. He cannot get any sleep for thinking of Churchill's death, and is rendered quite useless. "The idea of Churchill," he says, "is ever before my eyes. A pleasing melancholy will perhaps succeed in time, and then I shall be fit for something. . . . My mind turns much on my dear friend's request about his works." His fortitude is adequate to meet every affliction but the death of Churchill. In the next letter he says, "I begin to recover from the late cruel blow, but I believe I shall never quite get over it." An edition of Churchill will be, he says, one of "the future occupations of his life." The edition "will take him up several months, for he will never risk any crudities with the public."

On December 12, 1764, he writes: "I commission you, my dear Cotes, to contract in my name with any bookseller for a History of England from the Revolution, to be in two quarto volumes; the first portion of manuscript to be delivered on this day twelvemonth, the next this day two years; and I will submit the work to any man in England, the bookseller's friend, to make any retrenchments he chooses, but not a word

of addition. This is the work for my fame and my purse. . . . I will work for posterity, . . . and the world shall look after me, not with pity, but with envy and admiration." "I will be in everything very prudent," he adds, in another letter; "and my eye is ever fixed, not straightly, but steadily, on my two great works, Churchill's edition and the History." Similar professions he makes in subsequent letters to his daughter and to Cotes. He will dedicate himself to these works. He writes or reads ten hours a-day. In one letter he speaks of having half finished Churchill, and says that it shall be printed at Lausanne. He has it at heart "to show the world how much he loved Churchill." Winckelman sends him an antique alabaster urn, and he inscribes it to "his dear Churchill."

It may surprise the inquirer into the course of his life to find him at the end of this year, 1764, in possession of the means, notwithstanding his distressed circumstances, to start on a tour through France and Italy, and at length fixing himself in an elegant cottage near Naples. If we desire to learn from what source he obtained his supplies, we may gain sufficient information from a letter of Horne Tooke to Junius, where it is stated that the Rockingham Administration, which had now come into power, made up for him, out of their own private purses, "a clandestine and eleemosynary pension," the First Lord of the Treasury giving £300, the other lords £60 each, and the lords of trade £40 each; and "as any of them went out of the Ministry, their names were scratched off the list, and they contributed no longer." The fact was that the

Rockingham party had joined the Bedford Administration on the condition that the proceedings against Wilkes should be stopped; but, as that object could not be effected, they made up a pension for Wilkes among themselves, as an indemnification to him for the non-fulfilment of their intention.

He took his cottage at Naples in March 1765, and continued to reside there till the end of June. He tells his daughter, in his letters to her, that he designs to devote himself there to his two great works, his History of England, and his edition of Churchill. It is not probable, from the little results shown, that he had any serious intention of devoting himself to either. A residence so distant from the libraries and society of England was not favourable for writing either on ancient English history or on a modern English poet. Of the History nothing more was produced than an introduction; and of the edition only a few notes, doing honour to Wilkes rather than to Churchill.

Having broken away from Naples, he visits Voltaire at Geneva, and in October reaches Paris, whence he writes to Cotes that he is willing to be friendly with the Ministers then in office. "I wish," he says, "we may be friends in earnest; and, if we are, I will give every assistance that such mean abilities as mine can afford them." Cotes is desired to make these feelings of his known, as far as he can, to the Government, and "to negotiate all these matters." He is still willing to go ambassador to Constantinople, for "nothing can so effectually heal all breaches of every kind." Something had been said, as he had learned by a letter of Cotes's, about getting him a pension from some quarter; for he

says,—"The idea of an annual sum of £1000 being paid to me does not captivate my imagination. You mention that you do not yet learn upon what establishment or fund it is to be granted; and you desire me to write a letter for you to deliver to *them*, without mentioning, or even leaving me to guess, *who*. . . . You avoid the word *pension* with great care; yet I believe the world would rather consider such a grant only in that light, though I should myself look upon it as paying very poorly all the costs of suit due to me." Still he cannot help retaining a hankering after such a pension, for he writes again, a few days subsequently,—"Living here, not in an *hotel garni* and privately, £1000 a-year would soon make me easy and independent, as well as pay my debts in time." And again,—"Mr Fitzherbert and a few others have it not in their power, though I am satisfied it is warmly in their inclination—and, if they could, they would not hesitate —to grant me the £1000 a-year on the Irish establishment for thirty years, which I wrote you word Walpole promised." The letter in which this promise of Walpole is mentioned has not been made public. Thomas Walpole was the person meant, from whom, as he tells his correspondent, he had borrowed sixty guineas in Paris, lent "with a very good grace."

The truth is, as we learn from Horne Tooke, that he had been soliciting, during his residence on the Continent—or, as Tooke phrases it, demanding—the governorship of Canada or Jamaica, or the embassy to Constantinople; or, if those offices could not be given him, commissioning Mr Thomas Walpole to get him, if possible, a pension on the Irish establishment of a

thousand a-year for thirty years, with which, and a pardon, he declared he would be satisfied; but threatening, if something of the kind were not bestowed upon him, to write the Ministry down; expressing himself, as Tooke says, nearly in these words: "It cost me a year and a half to write down the last Administration; should I employ as much time upon you, very few of you would be in at the death." Such was the care of a professed patriot for the good of his country!

He now began to think that if he would not be doomed to perpetual exile, he must force his way home. The law term, he observes to Cotes, writing on Dec. 4, 1765, does not open till the end of January, and Mansfield could in no case pass sentence before that time. But he "is told that a resolution was formed that Mansfield should confine him for life on account of the Essay, besides a pillory." He is very anxious to keep the case of the Essay distinct from that of the 'North Briton,' and of the pillory he signifies elsewhere that he is very much afraid. He is therefore in doubt how to act, and wishes that some of his best friends would give him their opinions, for he would not come over to England against their decision. But, on the whole, he is inclined to think that his presence in London would embarrass Ministers and advance his affairs.

To London he accordingly returned, and addressed to the Ministry, through some clandestine channel, solicitations and threats such as we have already noticed. But "he found Lord Rockingham," says Horne Tooke, "something firmer and more manly than he expected, refusing to be bullied into what he could not perform." He then signified that his funds were exhausted, and

said that he could not leave England without money; when "the Duke of Portland and Lord Rockingham purchased his absence with one hundred pounds apiece." "For the truth of what I advance," adds Tooke, "I appeal to the Duke of Portland, to Lord Rockingham, to Lord John Cavendish, to Mr Walpole;—I appeal to the handwriting of Mr Wilkes, which is still extant." This money was sent to him by Edmund Burke, then private secretary to Lord Rockingham.*

He then remained abroad, living chiefly at Paris, till the autumn of 1766. In the preceding July there had been another change of Ministry, the Duke of Grafton having succeeded the Marquis of Rockingham as First Lord of the Treasury. The Duke's brother, Lord Southampton, had spoken to Wilkes several times at Paris about his affairs, and had dropped words that induced Wilkes to think the Duke favourably disposed towards him, and desirous to do him what he called justice. The Duke of Grafton had been intimate with Wilkes in the earlier part of his political career, and continued his connection with him, according to Junius,† "long after he had been convicted of those crimes since represented in the blackest colours of treason and blasphemy." With strong hopes from his Grace's support, therefore, he left his daughter in Paris, and, hurrying over to England, addressed, on the 1st of November, a letter to the Duke, expressing his peculiar satisfaction at seeing his Grace at the head of the Trea-

* Prior's Life of Burke, vol. i. p. 152.

† Letter to the Duke of Grafton, April 10, 1769. See also letter of "Atticus," Bohn's Junius, vol. ii. p. 246.

sury; his hopes that he might congratulate his country on such an appointment; and his assurances that he had never cherished a thought inconsistent with the duty of a good subject, and had never associated with traitors to the liberty of England. He then entreated his Grace to "lay him with all humility at the feet of his sovereign," and intercede with him, that the rigour of his long and unmerited exile might have an end. He flattered himself, he said, that his conduct would justify his Grace's intercession with a prince distinguished by tenderness and goodness to his subjects; and he felt certain that his Grace would second his supplication with readiness, for he was "sure that a heart glowing with the sacred zeal of liberty must have a favourable reception from the Duke of Grafton."

In reply to all these fine words, which he sent afterwards to the public prints, the writer was astonished to receive from the Duke only a verbal message, that "Mr Wilkes must write to Lord Chatham; that the Duke of Grafton did nothing without the concurrence of Lord Chatham." At such an unceremonious reply to his studied epistle Wilkes was mortified and provoked. He did not comply with the Duke's intimation; for he still looked to the influence of Lord Temple, and he knew very well that Lord Chatham and Lord Temple were now at variance, having disagreed, when the new Ministry was formed, about nominations for places. Lord Temple afterwards expressed his approval of Wilkes's determination not to write to Lord Chatham, who, he considered, would have gone farther than the Duke, and have desired him to quit the kingdom. The Duke of Grafton long afterwards admitted that neither

he nor any one of his colleagues was sagacious enough to see the policy of pardoning Wilkes.*

Finding, therefore, no more favour from the new Ministers than he had experienced from their predecessors, and not having made up his mind for confinement in a prison, he determined to return to Paris. His grief and rage at the disappointment of his hopes were excessive. He brooded over what he called his wrongs for month after month, till at last he resolved on giving vent to his resentment in a second letter to the Duke of Grafton, of a very different nature from the first. He attacked both him and Lord Chatham unsparingly. He reproached them both with being tools of Lord Bute; a notion in which he, in common with a large portion of the English people, was utterly mistaken. In this epistle, as was his custom whenever he could find opportunity, he gave a long statement of all that he had done and suffered in the cause of liberty. He is much surprised, he says, that a letter from a late member of the Legislature, couched in most respectful terms, and addressed to a nobleman who had on a variety of occasions testified a full approbation of the writer's conduct, should have met with so unpolite, so unfeeling, a reception. As to writing to Lord Chatham, he says, he could not think of supplicating a fellow-subject for mercy, especially one who, though once the favourite of his countrymen, had now, impelled by "private ambition lurking behind the shield of the patriot," fallen from the height of his glory into pensioned inaction. He then declaims on the want of feeling in Lord Chatham, of which he had as little as

* Jesse's Memoirs of George III., vol. i. p. 430.

Lord Mansfield, both being formed, if to be admired, certainly not beloved. Lord Chatham had received, he said, obligations of the first magnitude from Lord Temple, "one of the greatest characters our country could ever boast," yet he had failed to show Lord Temple any portion of gratitude or friendship; and how was any one else to expect kindness from so marble-hearted an individual, so untrustworthy as a friend, that, though he had flattered Wilkes himself at times, and had paid him compliments on his poems in the year 1754, he had afterwards deserted and reviled him, sacrificing him at the shrine of the Scottish idol, to whom he was then beginning to pay homage? Would it have become him after this, he asks, to write a suppliant letter to Lord Chatham? Dilating further on the character and conduct of his lordship as a Minister, he says that "he has served the public on all those points where the good of the nation coincided with his own private views; and in no other." He had raised the spirit of England in war, and even his most rash and extravagant projects had succeeded through the bravery of the British troops; and, if his advice had been followed, the late war might probably have terminated with more honour to England; but he had left the constitution of the country without the least obligation to him; and, what was his greatest fault in Wilkes's eyes, "had never once appeared in earnest about any question of liberty." He reviled Lord Chatham as being, on the whole, a mere successful political adventurer, who spent his life in culling words, arranging phrases, and practising a theatrical manner; and who affected a contempt of money, but at last "disposed of

his popularity, like an exchange-broker," for a title, a family pension, and the lucrative sinecure of the privy seal. He even asserts in this letter, in reference, as it is understood, to the 'Essay on Woman,' that Lord Chatham had seen it some years before, and had read it with pleasure: "If," says he, "I were to take the declarations made by himself and the late Mr Potter *à la lettre*, they were more charmed with those verses after the ninety-ninth reading than after the first." The author of the 'History of the Life of the Earl of Chatham'* also says that Wilkes, "in the most public manner, asserted that Lord Chatham had seen and applauded the 'Essay on Woman' some years before it was brought forward as an instrument of his ruin," and speaks of this as "unjustifiable treatment of his humbler friend." These affirmations who shall support or refute?

This letter to the Duke, whenever written, was dated, when published, "Dec. 12, 1767." It had the effect, like many other invectives against authority, of increasing its writer's popularity with the mob, who became more and more persuaded that he was a victim of persecution and greatly to be pitied. Almon intimates that offers of peace and compensation were made to Wilkes from the Ministry, "through a channel," he says, "which we are too near the time to reveal;" and that, as Wilkes thought proper to reject them, the Ministry were on that account the more exasperated against him. But we have already seen that Wilkes was more disposed to make advances to the Ministry

* Anonymous, 1783; Dedicated to Earl Camden. Life of Wilkes prefixed to the Letters to his Daughter, vol. i. p. 54.

than the Ministry to Wilkes. Wilkes's pecuniary condition was now desperate; his resources in England were exhausted; and he was running into debt at Paris, so as to render his residence there uncomfortable. He therefore determined, towards the end of the year, on returning once more to England, his object being, as a general election was coming on, to obtain a seat in Parliament; a seat for London, if possible—if not, for Westminster. Cotes thought he might be assisted in his aims by a subscription from the public "in support of liberty, honour, and gratitude." This scheme, however, he did not yet try. But he came to England, though his outlawry was still in force, in the beginning of February 1768, and in the following month addressed a letter to the King himself, entreating his clemency; stating that some former Ministers, whom his Majesty, in condescension to the wishes of his people, had seen fit to remove, had oppressed him, and driven him into exile, for having exposed their ignorance, inefficiency, and dishonesty; and adding that he trusted for pardon to his Majesty's goodness and benevolence, and that "every day of freedom which his Majesty might allow him to enjoy in his dear native land, the land of liberty, should give proofs of his zeal and attachment to his Majesty's service." To this application it is not recorded, we believe, whether any reply was returned, but, if any, it was not in compliance with the request.

CHAPTER IV.

Wilkes offers himself a candidate for the city of London—Is disappointed—Offers himself for Middlesex, and is elected—Compulsory illuminations—Appears voluntarily in the Court of King's Bench—Defends himself—His charge against Lord Mansfield of having altered the records—Attorney-General moves for his commitment on the outlawry—Lord Mansfield gives judgment that he cannot be committed, as not being legally brought before the Court—Riots among the populace—Attorney-General procures a writ of *capias utlagatum* against him—He is committed to the King's Bench prison—Addresses the freeholders of Middlesex—His outlawry reversed—Sentenced to fine and imprisonment—Tumultuous assemblies—Conflicts with the soldiery—Subscriptions for Wilkes—His life in prison—Elected an alderman—Determines to petition the House of Commons on his case, against the advice of his friends—His injudicious letter to the public papers—His petition voted frivolous—Is expelled from the House—Speech of Mr George Grenville on the subject—Wilkes's reply.

WILKES'S letter to the King, which, whether from ignorance or disdain of etiquette, was delivered by his servant at the gate of Buckingham Palace, was dated March 4; and on the 10th, in the midst of a general election, he had the audacity to publish, in all the newspapers, an address to the Livery of London, offering himself a candidate for the representation of the city. He declared, in his customary strain, that he considered his chief recommendation to their favour to be a zeal for liberty, which he had shown, respecting the two great questions of general warrants and seizure of papers, in such a way, he thought, as might place

him among those who have deserved well of mankind; and he assured the electors that his ardour for their interests, and affection for their service, should be shown in his unceasing endeavours to merit their approbation, "the most precious reward to which he aspired."

This reward he was not destined to obtain. There were seven candidates, and at the end of six days' polling he stood the lowest of the seven. He thanked his supporters; declared that, though disappointed, he was not dispirited; and announced his intention of soliciting their votes as electors for the county of Middlesex, for which he should at once offer himself a candidate, hoping still to have the honour of serving them in the senate.

On Monday the 28th of March, accordingly, after an address promising perseverance in the best of causes, he presented himself, at nine in the morning, on the hustings at Brentford, and at the close of the poll found that he had received 1292 votes, and Mr George Cooke, who stood next, 827. These two were therefore declared duly elected. A vast mob gathered on the occasion, who obliged not only the people of Brentford, but those also of London and Westminster, to illuminate their houses, breaking many windows that were left dark, and among them those of the Earl of Bute and of the Mansion House; and the following evening also, for fear of damage, there was a forced illumination throughout the city. Wilkes, in a number of fine words, congratulated his electors on their genuine independence and patriotism, and begged them to consider his past efforts in the "glorious cause of free-

dom" an earnest of his future endeavours for the same object.

On the 22d of March Wilkes had sent a notice to the Solicitor to the Treasury that on the first day of the ensuing term he would present himself at the Court of King's Bench. On the 10th of April he complained bitterly of the cruelty and oppression of the Ministry, who, for the purpose, as he said, of insulting him, served on him, in the midst of a party of friends with whom he was dining at the King's Arms, Cornhill, "an Exchequer Writ and Bill of Discovery," to discover and seize all his effects under the outlawry, as being forfeited to the Crown. First, however, Wilkes was to present himself, in conformity with his promise, before the Court of King's Bench, where he accordingly appeared on the 20th of April, "to submit himself," as he said, "in everything to the laws of his country." He observed, in addressing the Court, that two verdicts had been found against him; the one for the republication of the 'North Briton' No. XLV., and the other for the publication of what he termed a ludicrous poem. For the republication of that number of the 'North Briton' he could not see that he was at all worthy of blame, as he had re-read and re-examined it with care, and knew that it was in every part founded on the strongest evidence of facts. It contained nothing disrespectful to the person of the King; and as to the King's Ministers, its charges against them, he presumed, had been well founded, as every one of the Ministers had since been removed. As to the poem, he said that no thought of publishing it had ever entered his mind; that he blushed at the recol-

lection that it should have been in any way brought to the public eye. He had printed twelve copies privately, which he had carefully locked up, and had never given one of them even to the most intimate of his friends. Government had bribed one of his servants to rob him of a copy; and he prayed to God to forgive the jury who had found him guilty of publishing what he had carefully concealed, and which was not even yet published.

Wilkes at the same time complained that no verdict could have been found against him on either of these charges if it had not been for the alteration of the record of information against him. As this imputation on Lord Mansfield, of having unjustifiably altered the records, is reiterated several times by Wilkes and his partisans, it is necessary to bestow some attention upon the nature and grounds of it. It is thus related in a pamphlet of that day, called the 'History of the Minority:' "When the case of No. XLV. of the 'North Briton' stood ready for trial, Francis Barlow, a solicitor of the Crown Office, received directions, on the part of the Government, from Mr Wallace or Mr Webb, solicitors to the Treasury, to apply to a judge to get the information against Mr Wilkes amended by striking out the word 'purport,' and inserting in its stead the word 'tenor.' Barlow accordingly made application to Lord Mansfield as a proper judge, and obtained a summons to show cause why the record of information should not be so amended; in consequence of which Mr Philipps, Wilkes's solicitor, attended Lord Mansfield at his house in Bloomsbury Square, on the 20th of February 1764, the day before the trial was to come on. Lord Mansfield

asked Philipps whether he had any objections to such amendment. Philipps answered that he could not consent to it. Lord Mansfield replied that he did not ask his consent, but merely wished to know, if he had any objections, what they were, and then asked him whether it was not a usual proceeding to amend informations. His lordship then read some precedents out of a book which he had in his hand, and made a written order to amend the information in the manner which Barlow desired." It should be observed that the legal difference between the words *purport* and *tenor* is, that *purport* refers to the general drift or tendency of a matter under consideration, and *tenor* to the exact meaning of words; a difference which obliged Wilkes's counsel, on the following morning, to alter the line of defence which they had been some days preparing. But to such an alteration, says one of Wilkes's biographers, no practitioner of experience, except in a political cause, would have withheld his consent.*

This was the affair to which Wilkes referred, when he proceeded to say, "On the evening only before the two trials, Lord Chief-Justice Mansfield caused the records to be altered at his own house, against the consent of my solicitor, and without my knowledge; for a dangerous illness, arising from an affair of honour, detained me at that time abroad. The alterations were of the utmost importance. I will venture to declare this proceeding unconstitutional. I am advised that it is illegal, and that it renders both the verdicts absolutely void."

* Life of Wilkes prefixed to his Letters to his Daughter, vol. i. p. 86.

When Wilkes had concluded his speech, the Attorney-General moved for his immediate commitment on the outlawry. Sergeant Glynn, and three other counsel on Wilkes's side, argued that such a mode of proceeding was erroneous, and offered bail to any amount for Wilkes's future appearance. Lord Mansfield gave his opinion, as to the motion for commitment, against the Attorney-General, observing that he could not with propriety move for the commitment of a person who was not *legally* in Court, or duly authenticated to it; but, on the other hand, he remarked that Wilkes's counsel had no ground for a motion in favour of a person who had appeared before the Court of his own free will. Had Mr Wilkes, he said, been brought into Court by a writ of *capias utlagatum*, his counsel might then have made their motion with propriety, and the Court, if bail were offered for him, might have exercised their discretion in accepting or refusing it. As to the charge made against him by Mr Wilkes, of having granted an order for amending the information, or, as it was called, altering the record, by substituting the word "tenor" instead of "purport," he was very happy, he added, in having an opportunity of speaking on the point before so large an audience; for it was an application which he thought himself bound in duty to grant, knowing such to be the uniform practice of all the judges, and having himself frequently acted similarly in other causes, without finding any objection offered. The other judges agreed in opinion with Lord Mansfield as to the impropriety of the Crown officers throwing on the Court the responsibility of committing Mr Wilkes, when the Attorney-General might have brought him

before the Court legally by a writ, which it would have been easy to execute, as Wilkes had shown himself in public in London for several weeks past.

During these proceedings, as large crowds were gathered about Westminster Hall and the neighbourhood, and riots and tumults were apprehended, constables patrolled the streets, and the whole military force in London was kept in readiness for action. Battalions of the Guards were under arms in St James's Park and St George's Fields; and troops of horse were prepared for emergencies at the Tower and other places. The King accused the Ministry of inactivity and want of spirit, and wished the mob would attack Buckingham Palace, that he might sally forth and disperse them at the head of his Guards.*

The Attorney-General, acting on the suggestion of Lord Mansfield and the Court of King's Bench, procured a writ of *capias utlagatum* against Wilkes; and Wilkes, desiring to have all these proceedings brought to some kind of termination, requested that a sheriff's officer might be sent to execute it on him at his lodgings at noon on the 27th of April; and, as soon as this was done, Wilkes went straight to the Court. Wilkes's counsel again applied for his admission to bail. The Court replied that they had power to admit him to bail at their discretion, but only with the consent of the prosecutor; and as the prosecutor, the Attorney-General, thought it right to withhold his consent, Wilkes was consigned to the custody of the marshal of the King's Bench prison, who, with two assistants, carried him off in a hackney-coach for committal—Horne Tooke,

* Jesse's Memoirs of George III.

who was then one of his friends and supporters, being allowed to accompany him. When the coach reached Westminster Bridge, a dense mob, flocking round their demagogue, detached the horses, turned the vehicle round, forced out of it the marshal and his assistants, and drew Wilkes and Horne Tooke in it along the Strand. It was in reference to this procession that Burke said of Wilkes, *numerisque fertur Lege solutus;* an application of the words which drew from Johnson an acknowledgment of the wit in Burke which he in general so unwillingly allowed him. On their way, the mob often asked Wilkes "where he wished to go." He replied, it is said, "To the King's Bench prison, whither the laws of his country had sent him." At the Devil Tavern, near Temple Bar, he requested them to stop, but they would not obey. At length they reached the Three Tuns, in Spitalfields, where he again desired them to disperse; and, as soon as he could, left the house in disguise by a back way, and went to the King's Bench prison and surrendered himself.

He accordingly continued in confinement, but issued an address, on the 5th of May, to the freeholders of the county of Middlesex, in which he assures them of his steadiness in the cause of liberty, and expresses his hope that he shall one day concert with them, and other patriots, the means of "rooting out the remains of arbitrary power and Star-chamber inquisition."

It was not till the 9th of June that he was brought up for judgment. He said, both by his counsel and with his own mouth, that there appeared to be legal reasons for his outlawry being reversed. The Attorney-General entered upon a long argument in support of the out-

lawry. The judges, however, though they differed as to their reasons, agreed in opinion that the outlawry was illegal, and must necessarily be reversed. Wilkes had been assured on the 7th of May, on what he thought trustworthy authority, that Lord Mansfield, who ruled the Court, intended to establish the outlawry; but what had happened, says Almon, between that day and the 8th of June, on which the outlawry was reversed, to alter Lord Mansfield's opinion, cannot now be explained. The ground, however, on which the Court admitted that the outlawry must be annulled, was a point of informality, as the informations had not been filed by the Attorney-General, who was the proper officer for that business, but by the Solicitor-General; "an error so trivial," said one of the speakers on the subject, "that the Court of King's Bench declared that they were almost ashamed to mention it."* The Attorney-General then asked for judgment on the two verdicts, the one for the republication of No. XLV. of the 'North Briton,' and the other for the publication of the Essay and other obscene libels. Wilkes's counsel offered arguments in arrest of judgment, continuing to dwell on the alteration of the records; for on this point, *even though vanquished, they would argue still.* The Court deferred the argument till the 14th of June, when the judges, having heard both parties, declared that the objections in arrest of judgment were of no weight. Wilkes then requested that judgment might be passed upon him on an early day; and on the 18th he was brought before Lord Mansfield and the other

* Speech of George Grenville in the House of Commons, on the motion for expelling Mr Wilkes, Feb. 3, 1769.

three judges of the Court. Mr Justice Yates spoke for the bench, and, setting forth the enormity of the two offences, passed sentence to the effect that Wilkes should pay a fine of £1000; should be imprisoned for twenty-two calendar months; and should give security for his good behaviour for seven years—himself in a bond for £1000, and two sureties in bonds for £500 each.

Wilkes then entreated the Court, apparently to annoy Lord Mansfield, that the fact of the "alteration of the records" might be registered in such a form as to come by way of appeal before the House of Lords. Lord Mansfield answered him simply that, whatever was done, nothing would alter the law.

Previously to this time, while Wilkes was in prison, some occurrences had taken place which it will be proper not to leave unnoticed. A number of idle people had daily gathered round the building, in expectation of seeing him at one of the windows. The Ministry, justly apprehending that some disturbance might arise from such assemblages, sent a guard of soldiers every day to the prison; and Lord Weymouth, the Secretary of State, admonished the magistrates of Southwark by letter to take every precaution for the preservation of the public peace, and to apply for military assistance if occasion should require. On Tuesday the new Parliament met, and since Wilkes, as we have seen, had obtained a majority of votes for the county of Middlesex, a number of the lower orders had a notion that he would be released from confinement on that day, in order to take his seat in the House of Commons; and large crowds collected near the door in order to see him

come forth. When the soldiers arrived, consisting of a detachment from the 3d Regiment of Foot, commonly called the Scotch regiment, they are said to have pushed the people from their places in a rude manner and with insolent language. The crowd, being exasperated, began to throw stones and dirt at the soldiers, and though two of the magistrates stood forward and ordered the Riot Act to be read, they still continued to hurl missiles, the most conspicuous among the assailants being a young man in a red waistcoat, who so incensed three of the soldiers that they quitted their post to pursue him across the road, intending to shoot him or take him prisoner. He fled to a cowhouse in Blackman Street, belonging to a man named Allen, and escaped through it by a back way. The soldiers, entering the cowhouse immediately after his exit, saw another young man in a red waistcoat, the son of the cowkeeper, and, taking him for the object of their vengeance, shot him on the spot. This unhappy mistake only made the mob more angry and violent; and the military became proportionately more intemperate. Much firing was the consequence; and several persons were killed and more wounded. Wilkes called the affair "the inhuman massacre in St George's Fields," and wrote a pamphlet about it, of which, however, he printed only a few copies to circulate among his friends. Two of the soldiers were tried at Guildford for the offence, but the one who shot young Allen escaped by desertion. Wilkes, being subpœnaed as a witness, enjoyed a day's excursion in a postcoach-and-four, and a grand dinner at the best inn. Lord Barrington, Secretary at War, wrote, by command of the King, a letter

to the troops, dated May 11th, signifying his Majesty's high approbation of the conduct both of officers and men on the occasion.

In the early part of this year a subscription for Wilkes was started, under the auspices of Alderman Oliver and other City men, but was not very productive. It led, however, to another in the following year, under the direction of a society who called themselves "Supporters of the Bill of Rights," which succeeded better.* The object of it, being well supplied with money, seems to have lived sumptuously in the Bench, entertaining at times the members of the Beefsteak Club and other persons of his party. On the 1st of November 1768 he published a pamphlet, which he called 'A Letter on the Public Conduct of Mr Wilkes,' in which he once more detailed all that he had done and suffered in the great and good cause of liberty.

On the 27th of January 1769, as a vacancy had occurred in the Court of Aldermen for the city of London, Wilkes, from his popularity with a large party of the Londoners, was elected, though in prison, to fill it; but there being a party in the Court who expressed a doubt of the eligibility of a man under sentence of imprisonment, the opinions of several counsel on the point were taken, and as those of the Attorney and Solicitor General coincided with that of the majority of the Court of Aldermen, Wilkes was declared duly elected. But a motion to send notice to Wilkes of his election was negatived, lest, as it was said, a mandamus should be the consequence. So the alderman-elect was left in

* Almon's Correspondence and Memoir of Wilkes, vol. iii. p. 288.

jail. But the election gave him that connection with the city of London which was afterwards of so much profit to him.

Wilkes had previously published, in anticipation of the next meeting of Parliament, an address to the freeholders of Middlesex, in which he pledged himself to submit his whole case to the House of Commons in the form of a petition. He had, or professed to have, a persuasion that the Ministry had bound themselves to the Court to expel him from the House, and that they held their places only on fulfilment of their engagement. But the truth was, as his biographer Almon, who had means of ascertaining, testifies from his own knowledge, that there was no such engagement made, nor any resolution taken to expel him, until he presented his ill-omened petition. The Duke of Grafton was desirous that Wilkes should take his seat in quiet and without obstruction at the end of his imprisonment, and was not unwilling that the term of his confinement should be shortened. He even sent Mr Fitzherbert to Almon with a message for Wilkes, assuring him on his honour that, if he would abstain from petitioning, nothing should be done in Parliament against him; an assurance which he was induced to give because he saw that such a petition would, from the discussions which it must occasion, annoy and perplex the Government. Almon delivered the message, but Wilkes vouchsafed no reply. The Duke then sent Mr Fitzherbert to Wilkes himself at the prison, with the same message. Fitzherbert took Garrick with him, knowing, as Almon says, "that Mr Wilkes was not always correct in his reports of conversations." Fitz-

herbert told Wilkes that if he suppressed his petition, he might keep his seat, but that, if he persisted in petitioning, he would certainly lose it. Some small submission to the King, he added in confidence, would be all that was necessary to secure, in a very short time, the remission of his fines, and his entire emancipation. Wilkes replied that, as to submission to the King, he was always ready to make it, for he had never desired to offend him; but that, as to his petition, he thought it incumbent on him, as a patriot, and in fulfilment of his promise, to present it. Before he did so, however, acting on the hint of the Duke of Grafton about submission to the King, he wrote a humble petition to his Majesty, in which he spoke of "the unfair methods" that had been employed to convict him, and supplicated his "royal clemency;" which petition was presented by Sir Joseph Mawbey at a levee, but had not the honour of any notice. As to his petition to Parliament, which set forth all his wrongs once more, the consideration of it was fixed for the 27th of January 1769; but Wilkes, a few days after he had had it presented, had by some means got hold of a copy of Lord Weymouth's letter, which we have before noticed, to the magistrates of Southwark, and had sent it to the public papers with a line or two of preface, to the effect that, as it was "written three weeks prior to the fatal 10th of May," it showed "how long the design" of what he called the massacre "had been planned before it was carried into execution." * This publication, before the consideration of his petition by the House of Commons, had attracted the attention of the House of Lords, who

* Junius, ed. Bohn, vol. i. p. 149.

voted the prefatory remarks to be a libel; and the Commons, being consulted on the matter, declared themselves of the same opinion. The result was, that the petition of a man who could so express himself regarding an order of the Government was voted frivolous, and the writer himself was brought to the bar of the House, and asked what defence he had to offer for his remarks on Lord Weymouth's letter. Wilkes replied that he "gloried in confessing himself the author and publisher of those remarks," and that he "had thought it his duty to bring to light that bloody scroll." "I look on it," he concluded, "as a meritorious action, for which I ought to have your thanks." Thus far he was heard, and then dismissed without farther questioning. He seems to have spoken in the way which he jestingly recommended as the proper one for speaking at the bar of the House, "Be as impudent as you can, . . . and say whatever comes uppermost."* Next day Lord Barrington moved "That John Wilkes, Esq., who, having already been convicted of publishing seditious, obscene, and impious libels, and being now under sentence of twenty-two months' imprisonment for those offences, had now published what the House had resolved to be an insolent, scandalous, and seditious libel, be expelled from the House;" and this motion was carried by 219 votes against 136.

"The best defence of Mr Wilkes on this occasion," says Almon, "was the speech of the Right Honourable George Grenville, which met with universal approbation;" but "Mr Wilkes," he adds, "took exception to some passages in it." We may justly wonder that

* Croker's Boswell's Johnson, vol. vii. p. 52.

Almon should have called this speech a defence of Wilkes; and we cannot wonder at all that Wilkes should have taken exception to portions of it; for it is in truth no defence of Wilkes, but merely an argument on political grounds against his expulsion from the House of Commons; and there are parts of it in which Wilkes's character is very disrespectfully handled, though it contained, on the whole, a very fair judgment on the demagogue's proceedings, and was thus entitled to "universal approbation" among the sensible portion of the community. Mr Grenville could not agree, he said, with those who thought that Mr Wilkes ought not to be expelled because he was already "the most unhappy as well as the most oppressed and injured man that this age has seen; he is indeed unhappy," proceeded the orator, "because he is guilty, and guilt must ever produce unhappiness; but in other respects, considering his repeated offences, he has certainly been more fortunate than his most sanguine wishes could have expected. Could he have anticipated," asked Mr Grenville, "that the irregularity regarding general warrants would have been first exposed in his case, and have proved the foundation of his popularity, and the origin of the large damages for which he had sued, and on which he depended in a great degree for maintenance?" Dr Shebbeare, only eight years before, had been apprehended, and his papers subjected to seizure, on a general warrant expressed in exactly the same terms as that in Wilkes's case, for simply asserting, in a letter to the English people, that the grandeur of France and the calamities of England were due to the influence of Hanover over

the national councils; and as this publication was found libellous, he had been sentenced to be fined, to stand in the pillory, to be imprisoned for three years, and to find securities for his good behaviour for seven years; so that Wilkes, who had been convicted not only of political but of obscene and impious libelling, had suffered less for several offences than Dr Shebbeare for only one. As to the remarks on Lord Weymouth's letter, he thought them rather a libel on his lordship, which ought to be punished in some other way than by expulsion from Parliament. Some had remarked, he continued, that his exclusion from the last Parliament ought to be considered a sufficient disqualification for his sitting in this; for if he was unfit for a member then, what had he since done to make himself fit? This, observed Mr Grenville, would indeed be a conclusive argument, if the House had a discretionary power of excluding from itself all those whom a majority of its members should deem unworthy to sit among them; but no such authority was possessed by the House, which could only exclude or expel for some legal disqualification or proved offence. What remained to be considered, then, was the wisdom or policy of expelling Mr Wilkes; and those who advocate his expulsion say that it is a proper method of vindicating the honour of the House, of expressing its abhorrence of Mr Wilkes's offences, and of checking the spirit of faction and disorder. But as to checking such spirit, pursued Mr Grenville, Mr Wilkes had become such an object of regard among a large portion of the community, that it behoves the House to use increased caution not to go beyond what is legal and constitu-

tional, lest, as in the case of Dr Sacheverel, advantage should be taken of any excess to raise fresh clamour against the Government. Mr Wilkes himself, doubtless, would be very glad to see the House acting with unjustifiable severity, knowing that the continuance of his popularity depends on the persuasion that he is arbitrarily treated, and fearing lest, like Sacheverel, when he ceases to be thought a martyr, he should become an object of contempt. If such were not his sentiments, he would not have expressed himself to the House as glorying in having libelled Lord Weymouth, or have intimated, as he had done in questioning Barlow, a witness at the bar of the House, that the precedents of Lord Mansfield, in altering the records, were taken from the Star-chamber.* If he wished to keep his seat, he would use other language; but his object evidently was to make himself appear to the multitude a victim of Ministerial and Parliamentary injustice. If he is expelled, therefore, his expulsion will enable him to effect his purpose; but how would the House be affected by suffering him to continue a member of it? Of what detriment would his presence in it be? "Whatever talents he has," exclaimed Mr Grenville, "to captivate or inflame the people without doors, he has none to render him formidable within these walls, or to combat the weighty and powerful arguments which Ministers know how to employ." In conclusion, Mr Grenville expressed his conviction that, as leniency had been shown towards Wilkes for his previous offences, leniency should also be shown, from a sense of its policy, in regard to his Parliamentary condition, and that he should not be elevated by expul-

* Wilkes's Letter to George Grenville, Almon's Tracts, vol. iii. p. 73.

sion into that eminence which he would not attain by being allowed to keep his seat.

With this speech, though it advocated Wilkes's retention in Parliament, yet, as it pronounced him guilty and unhappy, compared him with Sacheverel, and allowed him no importance but on account of supposed martyrdom, it could hardly be expected but that Wilkes would be offended rather than gratified. He was indignant and incensed. He resolved on writing a long letter in reply to it. Lord Temple, to whom his intention became known, earnestly dissuaded him from executing it; but Wilkes persisted in his purpose, and his obstinacy so offended Lord Temple that the friendly intercourse between them, which had continued for more than twenty years, came at once to an end, and it is said that they never spoke to each other afterwards.

The reply which Wilkes wrote was entitled 'A Letter to the Rt. Hon. George Grenville, occasioned by his publication of the Speech he made in the House of Commons on the motion for expelling Mr Wilkes, Friday, Feb. 3, 1769.' It was published anonymously, as the production of a friend of Wilkes, and dated Nov. 4, 1769. The writer taunts Mr Grenville with having published as his speech a studied modification of what he really spoke; with having since inserted in it certain *mellitæ verborum globuli*, glowing touches and soft graces, which caused it to be read, as a literary composition, with much more pleasure than was experienced by those who listened to it when spoken. He accuses Mr Grenville of having advised and approved Wilkes's arrest under the general warrant, but of having, with the low cunning which marks his character, kept himself in the background, and allowed Lords Egre-

mont and Halifax to bear the blame, so that he artfully escaped the prosecution attendant on them. He calls Lord Egremont, for the orders which he gave to drag Mr Wilkes, if necessary, out of his bed at midnight, Mr Grenville's "brutal brother-in-law and colleague." He reiterates that "the business of St George's Fields on the 10th of May 1768, was a premeditated, inhuman, and cowardly massacre of fourteen innocent persons, for which the people, after having made various fruitless applications for justice on earth, cry aloud to heaven for vengeance." As for Mr Wilkes, the writer knows "his innocence, his perfect love of liberty, and his generous disinterested plans for the public." He is not unhappy, though in prison, for he is in full possession of "that favourite wish of the excellent patriot and poet Churchill, *the love of his native England,*" and he hopes "the enjoyment will follow Mr Wilkes to the grave, as it did his incomparable friend." He then observes that "it is no wonder that Mr Wilkes is a favourite with his country," for "he loves his country with the enthusiasm and disinterestedness of a Roman, beyond private friendship, personal regard, or family attachment; . . . he has sacrificed every consideration of fortune and private interest to his master-passion, the love of England." And as for any "private foibles," the writer hopes that Mr Wilkes "possesses great virtues enough to compensate for them." Then, with some depreciation of Lord Chatham, and high commendation of the character, abilities, and public virtue of Lord Temple, the letter concludes. But the great object of it is to persuade the reader that no such patriots as Wilkes and Churchill ever appeared on the face of the earth.

CHAPTER V.

Wilkes is re-elected to Parliament—Election declared void, and Wilkes pronounced incapable of sitting in that Parliament—Dyson's pamphlet on the subject—Wilkes again elected, and again declared ineligible—Ineffectual petition of the Middlesex freeholders—Caleb Whitefoord's opinion—Johnson's 'False Alarm'—Blackstone and Sir William Meredith—Colonel Luttrell received into the House in place of Wilkes—Subscriptions for the payment of Wilkes's debts—Lives luxuriously in the King's Bench—Expiration of his term of imprisonment—His pecuniary circumstances—Quarrels between him and Horne Tooke—His addresses to the citizens of London and the Middlesex freeholders—Wilkes entertained at the Mansion House—Continued extravagance—Wilkes and Junius—Wilkes elected Sheriff—Presented by the city of London with a silver cup for his support of certain printers—Notices of Oliver and Townshend.

NOTWITHSTANDING the opinion of George Grenville against Wilkes's expulsion, Wilkes, as we have seen, was expelled. A new writ was issued for the election of a member for the county of Middlesex. On the 14th of February a meeting of the freeholders was held on the subject, and the result of their deliberations was that he was re-elected on the 16th. But the House of Commons at once declared the election void, and added that "Mr Wilkes was, and is, incapable of being elected into the present Parliament."

About the question whether the House of Commons had the right of declaring a member whom they had expelled incapable of re-election into the same Parlia

ment, much was said and written at that time; and one of the ablest pamphlets of the day, arguing irrefragably on the affirmative side of the question, was that of Jeremiah Dyson, then a Lord of the Admiralty, and deserving of praise through all time for his munificent support of the poet and physician Akenside under his pecuniary difficulties. Dyson set the whole law of the matter, respecting the commitment, suspension, and expulsion of members, so clearly before the public, that every man of common-sense could see for himself that Parliament was not exceeding the powers which it not only had but ought to have. The three orders of the State, he observed, were invested, not only with conjoint powers for general legislation, but each with separate and individual powers, for the maintenance each of its own authority and independence. The Peers, says Lord Coke, with whom other legal authorities agree, have power of judicature in their own House; and the Commons have like power of judicature in their House; and the only rule by which these powers of judicature are regulated is *the law of Parliament*, which, as must plainly appear, is part of the law of the land. All matters concerning either Peers or Commons, regarding any proceeding in either House, must be discussed and determined, not by the civil or common law of the land, but by the course or custom of Parliament; and this is the reason why the judges are not to give any opinion on a matter of Parliament, Parliament itself being judge of its own law. As to the question of the power of Parliament to punish its own members, it is clear, as well from the oldest and most respectable legal authorities, as from the records

of Parliament itself, that the House of Commons has the sole and exclusive power of punishing its own members as such, either by commitment, suspension, expulsion, or otherwise; and that they have also the sole and exclusive power of examining and determining the rights and qualifications of those who are elected to be members of their body. Recorded instances of the exercise of such power, not only in the commitment of members—in which respect it has never been disputed—but in their suspension and expulsion, are extremely numerous. As to suspension, the House, for various causes or offences, whether within the House or without, has sometimes suspended a member during pleasure; sometimes till the member has performed a certain act, or till some question has been determined concerning him; and sometimes during that particular session of Parliament. As to expulsion, it has sometimes been inflicted for offences against religion or morality; sometimes for offences against the State; and sometimes for offences against the rules or dignity of the House. But, for whatever causes expulsion may be exercised, the effect of it must constantly be the same—namely, that the member expelled shall be incapable of being elected again to serve in the same House of Commons that expelled him. This would be the case with regard to any ordinary society, as a club or a college; a member expelled from it would be expelled for ever, or until the society itself should think fit to admit him again. And "it is not only evident from precedents," says Dyson, "that the House have a power of expulsion, but it is clear from the reason of the thing that they ought to have such a power

otherwise the most unworthy and unfit representatives may sit in Parliament, to the disgrace and detriment of the nation. To admit their right of expelling, and to argue that the member expelled may be re-elected that Parliament, is to contend for the grossest absurdity imaginable; it would expose the judicature of the House of Commons to the most flagrant insult and contempt; it would render the determination of the House totally nugatory, if the member whom they expelled to-day should be forced upon them again to-morrow." Nor can it be denied, in regard to the late election for Middlesex, that the House exercised their power in a legal and constitutional manner, declaring, when Mr Wilkes was returned after his expulsion, that he "was, and is, incapable of being elected to serve in this present Parliament." Of this declaration, publicly made known, the freeholders of Middlesex were bound to take notice (for every man is bound to take notice of the law as publicly set forth), and they could not therefore justly plead ignorance either of law or of fact in defence of their conduct.

To this tract of Dyson's a kind of answer was published, written by a barrister named Macintosh, a friend of Lord Temple,* and entitled, 'A Fair Trial of the Important Question; or, the Rights of Election asserted against the Doctrine of Incapacity by Expulsion or by Resolution, upon true Constitutional Principles, the Real Law of Parliament, the Common Right of the Subject, and the Determinations of the House of Commons.' This long inscription will give a pretty fair notion of what is to be found within. The author

* Almon's Correspondence and Memoir of Wilkes, vol. iv. p. 6.

writes, rather than argues, "about it and about it." He has plenty of words, plenty of talk about grounds and principles, but none of the straightforwardness and cogency of Dyson. He endeavours to make himself appear a champion of the constitution, and would perplex his reader into the belief that Wilkes may be reinstated in Parliament at the pleasure of the Middlesex electors, and ought to be so reinstated, lest the people of England, defenders of the constitution like himself, should be provoked to rise in rebellion against the Government.

As to the freeholders of Middlesex, they affected a persuasion that the House of Commons exceeded its constitutional powers, and persisted in electing Wilkes once more on the 16th of March. On the following day the election was declared void. Another writ was issued, and Colonel Henry Lawes Luttrell was brought forward by the Government as an opponent to Wilkes. Wilkes, at the close of the election, on the 13th of April, was returned by the sheriffs, Townsend and Sawbridge, as having 1143 votes, while Colonel Luttrell had only 296. But the House declared that Colonel Luttrell ought to have been returned, and ordered the return to be amended by inserting his name in the place of that of Wilkes. It was allowable, however, for any party to petition the House on the merits of the election; and in consequence, fifteen of the Middlesex freeholders got up a petition, declaring that, in voting for Mr Wilkes, they had no intention to throw away their votes, or relinquish their right of being represented in Parliament, and praying against the return of Colonel Luttrell. This petition was presented to the House by

Sir George Savile, on the 29th of April, and the House took it into consideration, but declared, on the 8th of May, that Colonel Luttrell had been duly elected.

In acting thus, the House, while it maintained a proper regard to reason and justice, and to its own dignity, did not act without precedent, but merely as it had acted on two other occasions, noticed by Dyson.* In 1715, Sergeant Comyns was elected for the borough of Malden, but as he had refused to take the oath of qualification, the House did not issue a new writ, but simply resolved that Mr Tuffnell, who stood next in number of votes, was duly elected. In 1728, a Mr Ongley was elected for the town of Bedford, but as he held a place in the Customs, which he had omitted to surrender before offering himself for election, the House at once declared him incapable of being chosen, and substituted for him the candidate next in number of votes. In these cases, as in that of Wilkes, the votes given for the disqualified candidate were considered by Parliament as thrown away. The matter was very well summed up by Caleb Whitefoord, in his letter to Junius, under the signature of Junia. "I fancy there is hardly one cool, moderate, impartial person in England who does not think that the House of Commons are the *only* judges of their own privileges; that no power on earth can force a member upon them whom they have declared *incapable of being elected;* and that if any person, under such known and declared incapacity, happens to have the greatest number of votes, the candidate who has the next greatest number of *legal* votes must of course be the sitting member. This

* Almon's Tracts, vol. iii. p. 439.

opinion seems to me to be perfectly agreeable to reason, to common-sense, and the principles of the constitution, and (notwithstanding the delusive appearance of petitions obtained we all know how) I do verily believe it is the opinion of every candid, impartial, unprejudiced person in England; in short, of all those who are not *the tools of faction* or *the dupes of party*."*

But the party who supported Wilkes argued that the votes given in his favour should not have been considered as thrown away; for, if they were not good votes for Wilkes, they should yet have been received as good votes against Colonel Luttrell. But to argue thus, was to assert that votes might have a power of negation; and if a number of electors might keep out a qualified person by voting for one disqualified, they might, as Dyson observed, keep a seat vacant as long as they pleased, and so deprive the State of a member. Yet it remained, nevertheless, liable to question, whether the House, while rejecting a person whom a constituency had chosen, but whom a majority of the members declared unqualified to sit, could justly receive into it a person whom no constituency had chosen.

It was in this state of things that Johnson wrote his 'False Alarm,' arguing, in a tone of strong sarcasm, that the nation need not fear ruin because a man in jail for sedition and impiety was not released to become a legislator. The vocation of Johnson was not to write political tracts; and of all his productions, those of this kind are the least pleasing. He utters much elegant declamation in set paragraphs, but puts his matter in a less attractive and convincing form for the general

* Junius, ed. Bohn, vol. ii. p. 274.

reader than Dyson. He reasons that if the Commons can but exclude for a while a member whom his electors may send back as soon as they please, their authority is but nominal; that the Parliament never intended to leave electors such liberty; and that as, by the statute of 30 Ch. II., any member who should refuse to take the oaths and subscribe the test, should be disabled from sitting during that Parliament, so Wilkes, declared, for his moral and political offences, unfit to sit as a member, and on that account expelled, must be considered as excluded and rendered incapable of sitting for the whole of the present Parliament. As to Wilkes's character, "lampoon itself," he says, "would disdain to speak ill of him of whom no man speaks well."

Judge Blackstone took the side of the Ministry, heartily concurring, as he expressed himself, with the majority of the House of Commons; and in a pamphlet entitled 'A Letter to Sir William Meredith,' a strenuous supporter of the minority, he observed: "The whole of this law and custom of Parliament hath its original from this one maxim, that whatever matter arises concerning either House of Parliament, ought to be *examined, discussed,* and *adjudged* in that House to which it relates, and not elsewhere." Decisions on all questions regarding the deserts of members to be admitted or excluded, "rest entirely in the breast of Parliament itself."

In opposition to this, Sir William Meredith, in a pamphlet called 'The Question Stated,' said: "If it be admitted as a principle that the law *is* what every court competent to try the case so adjudges, then may every court which is competent to try treason, make that treason which they adjudge so."

But in a short justificatory piece, called 'A Speech without doors upon the subject of a vote given on the 9th of March 1769,' Blackstone states more fully the grounds on which his vote for the Ministry was given; grounds the same as those which Dyson had laid down in his pamphlet. "That as the electors who give no vote at all have no power of excluding any candidate for whom other electors do vote, so those who give their votes for a person whom they know to be by law incapable, are to be considered exactly on the same footing as if they gave no votes at all. Not to give any vote —to declare I vote for nobody—or to vote for the Great Mogul, must decidedly have the same effect.

"Thus, then, it appeared to me that the general rule, that in case of *a known legal incapacity* in the person having the majority of voices, the capable person next upon the poll, although chosen by a minority, is duly elected, is consonant to reason, is the dictate of common-sense.

"That it had also the sanction of authority, I was as clearly convinced. The practice of the courts of law in such cases seems not to be disputed; they have, by repeated decisions, established the principle.

"Upon these grounds, therefore, both of reason and authority, I not only thought myself fully justified in giving my vote that Mr Luttrell was duly elected, but in truth I could not think myself at liberty to vote otherwise."

In a letter, too, entitled, "A Postscript to Sir William Meredith in answer to 'The Question Stated,'" he thus briefly summed up his notions on the proceedings: "It is the known and established law of Parliament

that the expulsion of any member of the House of Commons creates in him an incapacity of being re-elected; that any votes given to him at a subsequent election are, in consequence of such incapacity, null and void; and that any other candidate who, except the person rendered incapable, has the greatest number of votes, ought to be the sitting member."

The House having rejected Wilkes, the whole case, which Burke called "a tragi-comedy, acted by his Majesty's servants for the benefit of Mr Wilkes, and at the expense of the constitution," was now at an end. Colonel Luttrell was a member of Parliament, and Wilkes was left in prison. But the patriots did not neglect him. The Society to which allusion has already been made as calling itself "Supporters of the Bill of Rights," held a meeting at the London Tavern, in February 1769, at which a subscription was made for Mr Wilkes to the amount of £3023; and a circular was drawn up, in which the public were told that "the man who suffers for the public good should be supported by the public," and were exhorted, "by every tie of gratitude and humanity, so prevalent in British hearts, to rescue Mr Wilkes from his present encumbrances, and to render him easy and independent." So effective was the call, that at the end of a year the Society had been enabled to discharge debts of Wilkes to the amount of £12,000; had paid his election expenses and his two fines, a sum of £3973; and had advanced £1000 to Wilkes for his support in prison. The remainder of his debts, amounting to £6821, the Society discharged by composition in the course of the following summer, with the exception of £200 due at Aylesbury; a debt

which had brought on Wilkes much obloquy, and which the Society appear to have been slow to pay. Wilkes, when he was member for Aylesbury, had been treasurer to the Foundling Hospital there, and had received money to pay debts which he had not paid. This was stigmatised as a breach of trust. Wilkes excused himself by saying, that as the tradesmen did not call for the money it remained in his hands till he went abroad, when he put his affairs into the hands of Cotes, who afterwards became bankrupt. At length three members of the Society went down to Aylesbury and settled the account.

By means of subscriptions and presents from various quarters he was enabled to live sumptuously, and entertain people who buzzed about him, in the King's Bench. A sum of money was collected for him in the island of St Christopher, at the instance of Gardiner, a barrister who was in Wilkes's house when his papers were seized. A Mr Temple left him by will £300. £1500 were sent him from Charleston, South Carolina. The Duchess of Queensberry and Lady Elizabeth Germain sent him each £100, and a like sum was sent him by some gentlemen of Newcastle. Wine, poultry, game, and fruit came to him constantly in abundance from all parts of England.

On the 17th of April 1770 Wilkes's term of imprisonment expired. He was then possessed, according to Almon,* of an estate of £700 a-year; and out of it he had to pay £200 a-year to Mrs Wilkes, and an annuity of £150 to Reynolds, his attorney, who had purchased it for £1000; so that he had £350

* Correspondence and Memoir of Wilkes, vol. iv. p. 14.

a-year clear income; and he had also £2000 in hand remaining from Lord Halifax's fine of £4000. He being in such circumstances, a large portion of the Society thought the object of its institution was accomplished. But "Mr Wilkes and his friends," says his biographer, "thought otherwise. The Society had not," they said, "made him easy and independent," according to their declared intention. The question led to disputes; many members withdrew; and the Society at length came to nought. Wilkes himself, assuredly, when left with £350 a-year and money in hand, had no cause to complain, whatever his friends might desire more for him. But his object had been, as he let Gibbon understand, to make his fortune by his political adventures; and the little independence which he now had he refused to consider a fortune.

The "Bill of Rights Society" might have done more for Wilkes had it not been for the bitter quarrels between him and Horne Tooke and their respective partisans—quarrels which hastened the Society's dissolution. Wilkes accused Tooke of having treacherously made known to the public how he had been supported abroad by the Duke of Grafton's Ministry,* a fact which the party were to keep secret among themselves. Tooke retorted by charging Wilkes with extravagance and presumption. But the decisive rupture between the two grand factions was occasioned by a proposal of Tooke's party for the relief of Bingley, a printer, who had continued the 'North Briton' after Wilkes relinquished it, and who, for contempt of court, in refusing to answer, before Lord Mansfield, certain

* Junius, ed. Bohn, vol. ii. p. 163, note.

questions about the publication of a letter of Wilkes for which he was prosecuted, had been kept in prison more than two years. To this person, for his sufferings in the cause of liberty, it was proposed to vote £500. Wilkes and his supporters, among whom was his brother Heaton, opposed this motion, and succeeded in raising a majority against it. Horne Tooke and Wilkes then became irreconcilable enemies, and abused each other in a long correspondence in the public papers, in which Horne Tooke certainly had the better cause, and argued with greater force. He had long before remarked that the man who set himself up for a patriot, and endeavoured to put the Government in the wrong, should live with a proper regard to his character, and not luxuriously and licentiously. He had also advised that the £4000 which Wilkes had received as damages from Lord Halifax should be paid into the "Bill of Rights" fund, as an aid to the payment of Wilkes's debts; but Wilkes, as Horne Tooke states, had declared that this would be a robbery: he wanted to get the whole fund into his hands; he did not wish to submit to management, but to be manager himself; and hated those who studied his interest "as profligate young heirs hate the guardians who would save them from destruction." * The most respectable portion of the Society, accordingly, "disclaimed all personal attachment to Wilkes," declared "that his health should never be given as a toast in that Society," and advertised that "they supported him and his cause only as far as it was a public cause." †

* Horne Tooke's eleventh letter to Wilkes.

† Ibid.; Stephens's Memoir of Horne Tooke, vol. ii.

On the day after his liberation he published two addresses: one "to the worthy inhabitants of the ward of Farringdon Without," of which he was elected alderman; and the other "to the gentlemen, clergy, and freeholders of the county of Middlesex;" in both of which he assured all his friends that "to their service, to the defence of the laws, and to the preservation of the *religious* and civil liberties of the whole British empire, the remainder of his life should be dedicated." Nor did he forget to remind them of the alteration of the records, and of the inhuman massacre by the soldiery in St George's Fields.

A few days afterwards he was entertained at dinner by Lord Mayor Beckford and the aldermen at the Mansion House; and louder acclamations, he told his daughter, than he ever heard before, resounded through the city. In May and June he was sitting at Guildhall for the Lord Mayor while he was ill, and writing letters while he waited for witnesses. At the same time he found means to take a house at Fulham at a rent of sixty guineas a-year, while he still retained his other house in Prince's Court on lease for fourteen years. He also commissioned his daughter to purchase for him at Paris some dozens of expensive knives and forks, and showed himself prepared to indulge in every mode of extravagance.

This recklessness furnished Horne Tooke with another subject of attack on Wilkes's character. Wilkes, said he, "on quitting the King's Bench prison, took a house on a lease of fifty pounds a-year that he might lay out some hundreds on its repairs. At the same time he took a house at sixty guineas for the season;

and, to complete his plan of economy, he sent his daughter to Paris to see the Dauphin's wedding, while he himself was all the summer making the tour of the watering-places. That his generous *supporters* might not be too much ridiculed, he kept no more than *six* domestics; and that his politeness and gratitude to his country might keep pace with his economy, only *three* of them were *French*." Against these charges Wilkes could make but a very lame defence, the chief point in which was, that he had only *two* French servants. But he had something of an advocate in Junius, who sneered at "that canting parson" for wishing *to deny him his claret*."* Junius also intimated that Horne Tooke was paid by the Ministry to assail Wilkes, a notion which was entertained at the time by some others;† but no foundation for the charge was ever proved. Junius cared little for Wilkes, but was willing to use him as an instrument against the objects of his hostility. Junius, in his 'Letter to the King,' had recommended that his Majesty should pardon Wilkes, making his pardon "an act not of mercy but contempt;" adding, "he will soon fall back into his natural station, a silent senator, and hardly supporting the weekly eloquence of a newspaper. The gentle breath of peace would leave him on the surface, neglected and unmoved. It is only the tempest that lifts him from his place." And if 'C.' were Junius, as is generally supposed, Junius had pointed to Wilkes scornfully as a man of "most infamous character in private life,"

* Junius to Wilkes, September 7, 1771.

† Letter of Dr Francis to his son, in Parkes and Merivale's Memoirs of Sir Philip Francis.

"overwhelmed with debts, a convict and an outlaw," who yet had the confidence to offer himself as member of Parliament for London, and to the freeholders of Middlesex "as a proper person to represent a county in which he had not a single foot of land."* Afterwards it suited Junius's purpose to relax towards "Wilkes and his banditti," and to correspond with him about his City proceedings; and when Junius collected his letters for publication, he directed Woodfall to submit the dedication and preface to Wilkes's revision.†

In the latter part of 1770, and the early part of 1771, Wilkes travelled through much of the country, receiving here and there congratulations from patriots, till, on the 24th of June, his party proved strong enough to secure his election as one of the sheriffs of London and Middlesex, his friend, Alderman Bull, being the other. As he was so much accused of partiality to France, he ordered that no French wines should be used at the entertainments which he gave in his shrievalty.

In the course of the year 1772, the city of London presented Wilkes with a silver cup, of the value of £100, for his defence of liberty in the case of the printers who had published some of the proceedings in Parliament. The case was as follows:—

Miller, the printer of the 'London Evening Post,' was ordered to attend at the bar of the House of Commons; he refused, according to a plan concerted with Crosby the Lord Mayor, Alderman Oliver, and Wilkes. A proclamation was then issued by the Minister, in his

* Junius, ed. Bohn, vol. ii. p. 164, 165.
† Ibid., vol. ii. p. 40, 57, 102, 167.

Majesty's name, offering a reward of £50 for Miller's apprehension; and he was, in consequence, apprehended by one Whittam, a messenger from the Sergeant-at-arms; but Miller, on the other hand, gave Whittam, who attempted to seize him, into custody to a constable for an assault, and the two proceeded to the Mansion House, where the Lord Mayor, Wilkes, and Oliver, were prepared to receive them. The Lord Mayor, after hearing the case, denied the authority of the proclamation, and discharged Miller from the custody of the messenger; and Miller then charged the messenger with a breach of the peace in apprehending him. The Lord Mayor proceeded to commit the messenger to prison for the offence, unless he should give bail, which he refused to give; but at last the deputy Sergeant-at-arms, being informed of the matter, came and gave bail for him. The House of Commons, when the case was reported to them, resolved, after a long debate, by a majority of 170 to 38, that the Lord Mayor and Oliver had been guilty of breach of privilege, and should be committed to the Tower. When they were summoned before the House, Oliver alone appeared; for the Lord Mayor, who had been seized with a fit of gout on his way to Westminster, had been obliged to return; but two days afterwards, when he was sufficiently recovered, they were both placed at the bar, and both were sent away in custody to the Tower at midnight. A mob was waiting outside, who greeted and cheered them, and caused so much delay on the road that they did not reach the Tower till four o'clock in the morning. The House of Commons also forbade, by an order, all prosecution of their messenger, and even called for the

Mansion House minute-book, and caused the record of the affair to be erased from it—a proceeding which caused great indignation in the city, as being arbitrary and unprecedented. But as to Wilkes, who was the prime mover in the business, they contented themselves with citing him to appear at the bar on an appointed day; but he, though summoned three times, declared that he would not enter the House except to take his seat as member for Middlesex, and the House adjourned over the day that they had appointed. Thus the affair, as far as Wilkes was concerned, ended; for "the truth is," says Almon, "that they were afraid to proceed against him;" and there is no doubt that the Ministry were rather inclined to leave him in quiet, and not set him up again as an idol for the multitude. But it certainly seems both pusillanimous and absurd to have imprisoned Oliver with the Lord Mayor, for supporting his lordship, and to have left Wilkes at large, who supported him with equal publicity. Crosby and Oliver were maintained by the Corporation of London during their residence in the Tower, and honoured with addresses and illuminations when they left it; and Wilkes was presented with the cup, the design of it being left to himself, who chose the subject of the death of Cæsar, with the following words, from the audacious Churchill, subscribed:—

> "May every tyrant feel
> The keen, deep searchings of a patriot's steel."

Wilkes, in writing to Junius, about the same time, had used the expression, "I could plunge the patriot dagger into the heart of the tyrant of my country;" words probably suggested by the verse of Churchill

which he was contemplating. But from that time all proceedings against printers for publishing debates in Parliament were discontinued; and the journalists have since been allowed to report them without restrictions.

Brass Crosby, the Lord Mayor at that time, and Member of Parliament for Honiton, had been, as Walpole tells us, a low attorney, who had married his master's widow, and afterwards the widow of a butcher. He was a rough sort of personage, not wanting in shrewdness, and had a keen regard to his own interests. Beloe describes him as "of no talents, of coarse appearance, and rude manners." Oliver was a West India merchant, and, according to the same authority, "in external manners the perfect gentleman." He was so sincere in his politics that, on seeing cause to suspect Wilkes of selfish motives, he relinquished connection with him, and refused to be his colleague in the office of sheriff.*

It may be worth while to notice that another of the fraternity of aldermen, Mr James Townshend, a man of the sort commonly called eccentric, haughty towards his superiors but affable to those below him, was so strenuous an opponent of the Government in the matter of the Middlesex election, that he denied the legality of the Acts passed by the Parliament from which Wilkes, who had been chosen for it, was excluded, and into which Luttrell, who had not been chosen, was admitted; arguing, with Junius,† that if any part of the representative body was not elected by the people, that part vitiated the whole. The Act for

* Sexagenarian, vol. ii. p. 25, 26.

† Letter xxxvii.

raising the land-tax, in particular, Townshend refused to obey, and allowed his hay to be seized by the collector rather than pay the tax levied on the ground. When the collector had seized it, he brought an action against him for trespass, and the cause was tried before Lord Mansfield on the 9th of June 1772. Sergeant Glynn, always ready to assail the Government, argued for the plaintiff, affirming that the body of men who passed the Act were improperly called a House of Commons. Lord Mansfield remarked that, in all that Glynn had said, there was no evidence as to the case, but a mere impugnation of the judgment of the House of Commons, to which he was not sitting there to listen, and desired the jury to find a verdict for the defendant. One of the jury expressed dissent, upon which his lordship said: "Gentlemen, you are sworn to give a verdict according to evidence; but as no evidence against the defendant has been produced to you, and as you cannot try facts by *notoriety*, your verdict must necessarily be given in the defendant's favour." The recalcitrant juryman was thus silenced, and the defendant acquitted.

CHAPTER VI.

Wilkes twice disappointed of the mayoralty—His poverty—Is chosen Lord Mayor—Affair of Mrs Barnard—Wilkes enters Parliament as member for Middlesex—Meets Dr Johnson at Dilly's—Decline of his popularity—Thrice disappointed of the chamberlainship—Grows poorer and poorer—Is at last elected chamberlain—His speeches in Parliament—The great object of most of them—Records of the Middlesex election expunged from the Journals of the House—His conduct at Lord George Gordon's riots—Invites Dr Johnson to dinner—Sir Nathaniel Wraxall's observations on his manners—Charles Butler's notions of him in the latter part of his life—His editions of Catullus and Theophrastus—His insincerity towards Mrs Sterne—Residence in the Isle of Wight—His discharge of the duties of the chamberlainship—His death—Is found to have died insolvent—His daughters—His illegitimate son—Character of his letters to his daughter Mary—General view of his character, private, public, and literary.

In October 1772, Wilkes was put forward by the Livery as one of the persons eligible for the office of Lord Mayor, but the Court of Aldermen did not elect him. In the following year he was similarly proposed, and similarly rejected. According to a saying recorded of Johnson by Boswell, the influence of the Ministry was exerted to prevent his election. "It is wonderful to think," said he, "that all the force of Government was required to prevent Wilkes from being chosen the chief magistrate of London, though the Liverymen knew he would rob their shops if he durst, and debauch their daughters if he could."*

* Croker's Boswell, vol. v. p. 78, *anno* 1773.

In this year, by whatever means he had wasted his little property, we find him so low in pecuniary circumstances as to accept another contribution from at least three of the great Whig lords, the Dukes of Devonshire and Portland, and the Marquis of Rockingham.* But in the next year, 1774, he was successful in his canvass for the mayoralty. His daughter enacted the part of Lady Mayoress, and his year of office is said to have been the most brilliant since that of Beckford.

During his mayoralty occurred an affair which would have damaged his moral character, if it had been possible for anything to make it worse than it was. He and Mr Barnard, the son of Sir John Barnard, had long been intimate friends, and while Wilkes was confined in the King's Bench, Mr and Mrs Barnard constantly visited him; and after his release the intimacy continued, and Barnard, in any difficulty, sought Wilkes's advice. But while Wilkes was Mayor, Mrs Barnard was seized with a fever, and in a fit of delirium uttered words that amounted to a heavy charge against him. Wilkes denied that there was the least foundation for it, and intimated that the lady was insane. Many letters on the subject passed between Wilkes and Barnard; and Barnard at last proposed a meeting between his wife and Wilkes, at which no one but Barnard himself should be present. Wilkes first argued against such a meeting on the ground of its impropriety in Mrs Barnard's state of health; but, as Barnard persisted in desiring it, he always pleaded, whenever a day was fixed for it, unavoidable engage-

* Rockingham Papers, vol. ii. p. 236, 237; Jesse's Memoirs of George III., vol. i. p. 422.

ments of business, and contrived, on various pretexts, always to elude the interview. Barnard, provoked and exasperated, wrote Wilkes an indignant letter, telling him that he believed his wife's assertions, and that he renounced all farther intercourse with him; and cancelled, at the same time, his will, by which he had bequeathed to Wilkes legacies to the value of more than ten thousand pounds. Wilkes was of course concerned—if not on any other account, at least for the loss of the money—and tried many methods to effect a reconciliation. Among other expedients he induced a Mr Petrie, a friend of both parties, to write Barnard a letter declaring the improbability of Wilkes's guilt; and suggested to Petrie the terms in which he should express himself. Petrie wrote, though not exactly as Wilkes had prompted him; but Barnard took no notice of the letter. Almon, Wilkes's friend, says that he saw all the letters that passed between Wilkes and Barnard on that occasion, and "has no hesitation in saying" (emphasising his opinion in italics), "*that Mr Barnard's suspicions appear to have been well founded.*"

There being a dissolution of Parliament this year, as the Ministry had resolved on war with America, and wished to have new supporters, Wilkes again offered himself a candidate for Middlesex, and being elected, took his seat without opposition. He continued in Parliament for many years, and delivered many speeches, but seldom with much weight or effect.

It was in 1776, six years after the publication of the 'False Alarm,' that Wilkes and Dr Johnson were

brought together at Dilly's by Boswell in the manner which he so circumstantially details. Wilkes put on his best behaviour, being determined to please the sage; and he succeeded. He did not talk as he had talked to Sterne or Churchill. Ridicule of Scotland was one topic on which they could converse without discord. Johnson went home and told Mrs Williams "how much he had been pleased with Wilkes's company, and what an agreeable day he had passed."

In another company, in the following year, he observed, "Did we not hear so much said of Jack Wilkes, we should think more highly of his conversation. Jack has a great variety of talk, Jack is a scholar, and Jack has the manners of a gentleman. But after hearing his name sounded from pole to pole as the phœnix of convivial felicity, we are disappointed in his company. He has always been at *me;* but I would do Jack a kindness rather than not. The contest is now over."

His popularity among the Londoners seems about this time to have declined. In 1776 Sir Theodore Janssen resigned the office of chamberlain of the city, and Wilkes hoped to succeed him; but, notwithstanding great exertions on the part of his supporters, a rival candidate, Alderman Hopkins, was chosen by a majority of 177. The next year he aspired again to the office, but with equal ill fortune. A third attempt, in 1778, procured him only 287 votes against 1216. "His situation at this time," says one of his biographers, "was truly melancholy; his interest in the city appeared to be lost; a motion to pay his debts had been rejected in the common council; he was involved in difficulties of various kinds; his creditors were clamorous; and such

of his property as could be ascertained, and amongst the rest his books, had been taken in execution; those who formerly supported him were become cold to his solicitations, and languid in their exertions, and the clouds of adversity seemed to gather round him on every side, without a ray of light to cheer him." He speaks of himself, writing to Petrie, in August 1778, as "steeped in poverty to the very lips." The member for Middlesex "was sometimes," says Almon,* "in want of a guinea." A private subscription among his friends, of which Alderman Bull was one of the treasurers, afforded him but temporary relief. Even the silver cup given him by the corporation he was necessitated to pledge. Yet at this very time he was running more deeply into debt to support a Mrs Arnold, with whom he had kept company at Bath (whither he had formerly been fond of making excursions), and who bore him a girl, christened Harriett, in October 1778. There is no doubt that he was sinking headlong into ruin. What causes concurred, in the following year, to produce a state of things more favourable to him, it is not easy to ascertain; but on the death of Alderman Hopkins, in November 1779, he was elected chamberlain; and the emoluments of the office, which, in spite of some attempts to deprive him of it, he retained to the end of his life, placed him in easy and comfortable circumstances. "It is a post adequate," he said, "after payment of my debts, to every wish I can form at fifty-three; profit, patronage, and extensive usefulness, with rank and dignity."† When he had obtained this

* Correspondence and Memoir of Wilkes, vol. v. p. 32, 82.

† Letter to Petrie, Almon, vol. v. p. 37.

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appointment, he thought it well to cease from political agitation, and to "dwell in decencies" as a quiet member of society. He discharged the requirements of the office with regularity, and was noted for the aptness of his addresses to eminent persons when, in the performance of his duty, he had to present them with the freedom of the city.

Reviewing his career in Parliament, we find his speeches, as we have said, neither very vigorous nor very effective. Looking to the subjects of them, as they are collected in an octavo volume, we find him, in 1775, when it was proposed, as usual, that the chaplain should preach before the House on the 30th of January, moving sarcastically, not to say impudently, that that day should be kept, not as one of fasting, but as one of triumph; as a day "on which an odious, hypocritical tyrant, who made war on his people, and murdered many thousands of his innocent subjects, was sacrificed to the public justice of the nation; a deed to be had in solemn remembrance as the most glorious ever done in this or any other country." He spoke also for shortening the duration of Parliaments, for just and equal representation of the people, and several times for abstaining from war with America. But the great object of all his oratory in the House was, that the records of the Middlesex election, in which he was pronounced incapable of serving in Parliament, might be expunged from the journals of the House. This subject he brought forward several years, as often as any hope of success presented itself; but it was not till 1782, during the Ministry of Lord North, that he succeeded in attaining his end; and he heard the order

read that the resolutions respecting that election should be expunged, "as being subversive," it was added, "of the rights of the whole body of electors of this kingdom." These words he must have heard with great delight; but it seems matter of regret that they should have been added; for how would the House act with another Wilkes under similar circumstances? They would exclude him, it may be thought, but would not again force in a Luttrell.

In June 1780 occurred Lord George Gordon's riots. Johnson, writing to Mrs Thrale at that time, says: "Mr John Wilkes was this day in my neighbourhood, to seize the publisher of a seditious paper. . . . The rioters attempted the bank; Jack Wilkes headed the party that drove them away. . . . Jack, who was always zealous for order and decency, declares that, if he be trusted with power, he will not leave a rioter alive." For his services in these riots he received the thanks of the Privy Council.*

In 1781 Johnson again dined at Dilly's with Wilkes, then chamberlain of London, and the two were still more sociable than they had been on the former occasion. Johnson made Wilkes a present of a copy of his 'Lives of the Poets,' and Wilkes called on Johnson to thank him, and sat talking with him a long time.† In May 1783 we find Wilkes and his daughter inviting Johnson to dine with them, and Johnson politely excusing himself on account of prior engagements.‡

* Life prefixed to his Letters to his Daughter, vol. i. p. 123.

† Croker's Boswell, vol. vi. p. 184; vol. vii. p. 327; vol. viii. p. 79.

‡ Almon's Memoir of Wilkes, vol. iv. p. 321.

Sir Nathaniel Wraxall, who knew Wilkes, said of him that he "was pre-eminently agreeable; abounding in anecdote; ever gay and convivial; converting his very defects of person, manner, and enunciation, to purposes of merriment or entertainment. If any man ever was pleasing who squinted, who had lost his teeth and lisped, Wilkes might be so esteemed."* Lord Mansfield, speaking of him in 1783, at a dinner at Mr Strachan's, said he was "the pleasantest companion and the politest gentleman that he knew."†

About this period, too, from 1776 to 1784, Charles Butler associated much with him. Charles Butler found him a "delightful and instructive companion" on the whole, but had to endure in his talk something of the Medmenham Abbey seasoning. He was, he says, "too often offensive by his freedom of speech when religion or the sex was mentioned." "In his manner and habits," he observes, "he was an elegant epicurean;" but adds, what must surprise many a reader, that he was not altogether a follower of Epicurus, for "it was evident to all his intimates that he feared

'Aliquos manes et subterranea regna.'"

As to his politics, continues Butler, he was in reality "an aristocrat, and would much rather have been a favoured courtier at Versailles than the most commanding orator in St Stephen's Chapel." Falling into pecuniary distresses, and betaking himself to politics, "he assumed the character of a stanch Whig, and all must admit his consistency." He used to say that

* Wraxall's Historical Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 297.

† Life of Wilkes prefixed to his Letters to his Daughter, vol. i. p. 163.

he "thought highly of the talents and firmness" of George III., and was persuaded that any Ministry with fair talents must have stood with his support.*

Wilkes is not the only political character that has been on the lower level in public affairs when he had rather have been on the upper. Burke is said to have been always at heart much more of a Tory than a Whig, having no liking for the cause of the multitude, on whom he fixed the epithet of swinish. Cobbett became a Radical, not from inclination, but because Pitt, as it is told, was unwilling to meet the ex-sergeant at dinner, or, at any rate, because he was not sufficiently encouraged by Pitt's Government. Pitt's father took the side of the Opposition, in order that he might assail the aristocratic powers who had slighted his talents. Henry Brougham, when he was climbing up on the shoulders of the populace, was aiming at a stand on the Tory platform. And Macaulay would have stood forth a strong Conservative had not the Conservatives rebuffed him into a Liberal. How, indeed, is it possible that a man of education, who has read enough to understand the effects of human action on human society, should feel within himself other than Conservative tendencies?

Being at ease in his circumstances, he had leisure for resuming his classical reading; and it is not strange that he who printed the 'Essay on Woman,' and wrote the inscriptions at Medmenham Abbey, should have found a favourite in Catullus. Of this author, in the year 1788, he printed, at the press of John Nichols, whom he had appointed his deputy in the ward of Farringdon Without, an edition in small quarto, con-

* Charles Butler's Reminiscences, vol. i. p. 75 *seq.*

sisting of three copies on vellum, and a hundred on fine writing paper. The text is a reprint of that of Vulpius at Padua, 1737. It is declared by Almon to be as free from faults as the immaculate edition of Horace printed at Glasgow; "not a word is misspelt—not a stop is misplaced or omitted." As Almon was himself a printer, his word might be considered to have weight. But it is dangerous to pronounce such absolute laudation. We go no farther than page 15 to find *pœcicabo* instead of *pœdicábo*, with a numeral in the margin omitted; and in the same page we find *sœclum*, which in page 1 is printed *seclum*.

In 1790 he printed at the same press, and of the same size, an edition of a hundred and twenty copies of Theophrastus, a more decent author. There is only the bare text, and without accents—not because the editor disdained accents, but because he was ignorant how to give them accurately. Count Revickzy, the Russian ambassador to England at that time, remonstrated with him on the omission of the accents, and Wilkes replied that he would willingly print a copy for him with accents, if he would find a person to settle them. Not only are the accents omitted, but the breathings also, both rough and smooth. The edition had the merit of being the first complete one, for in it were inserted the two chapters discovered in the Vatican by Amadutius, and published by him separately in 1786. Both the Theophrastus and the Catullus are said to have been the result of wagers about producing perfection. One of those to whom Wilkes sent a copy was the Lord Mansfield whom he had so often abused;

and who, in a polite note of thanks, congratulated the editor "on his elegant amusement."

In 1768 had died Laurence Sterne. He had been, we have noticed, intimate with some of the monks of Medmenham Abbey. He died overwhelmed with debt; and his wife and daughter, scarcely able to find the means of subsistence, applied to two of the monks, Wilkes and John Hall Stevenson, to subscribe to an edition of Yorick's Sermons. Both of them promised more than to subscribe; they promised to write a Life of Yorick to be prefixed to the volume. Miss Sterne wrote to Wilkes in 1769, when he was in the King's Bench, reminding him of his promise, and begging him to stimulate Hall. Becket, the bookseller, "ought to pay handsomely," she says, "for the Life of Mr Sterne, wrote by two men of such genius as Mr Wilkes and Mr Hall." Three months afterwards, having received no answer, she writes again, begging for an assurance that he would perform his promise, as, since she last wrote, they stood more in need of such an act of kindness than before. "Write to Hall," she says—"in pity, do!" To Hall she herself writes in the beginning of 1770, complaining that though both had promised, "out of the benevolence of their hearts," to write the Life, neither of them had favoured her with a reply to her letters on the subject. Whether she ever received a reply is uncertain; but not a page of the Life was ever written either by Wilkes or Stevenson.

In 1788, nine years after he became chamberlain, he took on lease for fourteen years an elegant cottage in Sandown Bay, in the Isle of Wight, previously

occupied by the Earl of Winchelsea. In the grounds he put up inscriptions, not like those at Medmenham Abbey, but to filial piety and Mary Wilkes; to *Fortuna Redux* and the City of London; and to Charles Churchill, *Divino poetæ, amico jucundo, civi optimè de patriâ merito!* Here, in his odour of respectability, he was visited by the respectable; among whom was Dr Joseph Warton, who often crossed over to the island, and conversed with him upon classical subjects, and on his edition of Pope, encountering from him no dissuasion to insert in it "sober advice from Horace."

In 1790 he changed his town residence from Prince's Court, Great George Street, to Grosvenor Square, whence he walked to Guildhall every day that his duties demanded his attendance; duties that he is said to have discharged with great efficiency; for, to secure the emoluments of his office, he did not neglect to fulfil its requirements.

Besides these two houses, he had another at Kensington Gore, in which he kept Mrs Arnold and his daughter Harriett, and lived with them at times for short intervals, giving directions about Harriett's education.

In Grosvenor Square he died, on the 26th of December 1797, meeting death, as Mr Almon tells us, "with exemplary calmness and fortitude;" to which tranquillity a marasmus may have contributed, with which he was affected as he drew towards his end. He gave directions in his will that the place of his burial should be marked with a plain stone, inscribed only with the dates of his birth and death, and his name with the words "a friend of liberty" attached to it. He be-

queathed a number of legacies, and had assured his daughters and Mrs Arnold, a short time before his death, that they would find a large balance at his bankers; but when an examination was made into his circumstances, it was discovered that he had died insolvent, and had not left enough to pay a fifth part of his legacies. The early years of his chamberlainship had been very productive, but the latter years had yielded much less. However, enough had been settled on Miss Wilkes, by her father or other relations, to enable her to live in good style in the house in Grosvenor Square; and she made, greatly to her credit, good provision for her half-sister and Mrs Arnold. She survived her father only four years and a half. Her accomplishments, attractions of manner, and grace in conversation, were generally admired; but there is nothing in her letters denoting superior power of thought. The other daughter, who was also well educated, was married at the age of twenty-four to Mr Rough, a barrister.

His illegitimate son, whose mother was Catherine Smith, a coarse illiterate woman that had been his housekeeper, he brought up under the name of John Smith, and called him his nephew. He sent him for a while to Harrow, and afterwards to an academy at Hamburg, and to another at Paris, and then obtained him a cadetship in India. From Bengal he wrote several letters to "his uncle," which are preserved by Almon; but after 1792 nothing more was heard of him.

A large number of his letters to his daughter Mary, and some of his daughter's to him, have been preserved

and published, some by Almon, and others by an anonymous editor. They tell chiefly of matters concerning them and their connections; and many of them the public could well have spared. The language of them indicates a kind of Chesterfieldian affection, if we may so express ourselves, on the part of Wilkes towards his daughter, and a similar feeling on her side towards him. The morality of his epistles is such as might be expected from his life, and that of his daughter appears very much in conformity with it. He writes to her about his natural children, and intimates his connection with Mrs Arnold, without the least scruple; and she receives such communications as matters of course. As to religion, he not only sneers at Christianity, but shows no touch of any religious feeling at all; no sense of any higher power; not the least recognition, such as Charles Butler fancied in him, of any *manes* or *subterranea regna*, any probability of another state of existence. His daughter testifies the same insensibility to such matters. A father must have spoken very freely to his daughter on such subjects, before communications of such a nature could have passed between them. He tells her that he has been "his own chaplain since Churchill's death."* He invites a certain Dr Wilson of Bath, one of his own persuasion, to dine with him, and exclaims, "What good pious company Alderman Wilkes keeps!"† He acquaints her that he has attended some friends to church; and she rejoins, "I am much edified by my dear papa's going to church, and hope his piety will be rewarded with a good

* Letters to his Daughter, Almon, vol. v. p. 44. † Ibid., p. 46.

sermon whenever he is so well disposed."* In another letter, he says that he remains "sound in the faith," and will keep to his "good orthodox mother, the Church of England, to the last moment of its *legal* establishment."† He remarks that he "sleeps as well as any Christian, especially in a pew, but he does not always speak like a Christian."‡ He thinks twelve admirals, who had sent in an ill-worded memorial to the Government, "as great fools as the twelve ——, and as bad writers."§ He sends his daughter, to make her laugh, an account of a pretended Christmas dinner suitable to the day, consisting of "the Paschal Lamb, with the fry, St Peter's cock *à la* cocky-leeky, a cod's head from the miraculous draught, calves' heads *à la* Golgotha," and other imaginary dishes of the same character.‖ Nor are there wanting in portions of these epistles strangely free allusions on both sides to the commerce between the sexes, such as, fortunately for the cause of morality, rarely pass between a parent and his daughter. The daughter, in reference to a French princess being delivered of a daughter, says, "Il faut espérer que son auguste epoux sera plus *habile* la première fois;" and the father exclaims, "Comment donc, est-ce que je n'ai pas été bien *habile*, quand j'ai fait un chef-d'œuvre neuf mois avant votre naissance . . .? Et vous, petit ange, vous osez me reprocher que je ne suis pas assez *habile!*"¶ When an acquaintance, a Mrs Swinburne, is expected to become a mother, the father tells the daughter that he

* Almon, vol. iv. p. 75, 101, 107.
† Letters to his Daughter, vol. ii. p. 19. ‡ Ibid., p. 47.
§ Ibid., p. 148. ‖ Ibid., p. 180. ¶ Ibid., p. 132.

has sent a pheasant for the lady if that event has happened; or, if not, "for Mr Swinburne, for having done his duty."*

We have thus taken a brief view of the career and character, the doings, sayings, and writings, of a demagogue who made a great noise in his day. We find him *parem sibi*, consistent with himself from the beginning of his course to the end. We find the same strict regard to the interests of self, and the same light regard, whatever more might be pretended, to those of others. We see abundance of attorney-like cunning to make the most of fortuitous advantages, but nothing of the conception of great principles, such as should distinguish the wise and sincere student of the public good. He kept in view what he had avowed to Gibbon—the making of his fortune by popular agitation. His cry for liberty was meant to be but a clamour for his own benefit. The mob, of whose cause he pretended to be the champion, he thoroughly despised. "I wonder," said he to one of his opponents, as they contemplated the multitude of Middlesex voters from the hustings at Brentford, "whether among the crowd the fools or the knaves predominate." "I will tell them what you say," returned his rival, "and put an end to you; for you could not stand here an hour after I did so." "Nay," rejoined Wilkes, with the utmost coolness, "it is you that would be at an end; for I have only to tell them that it is a fabrication, and they would destroy you in the twinkling of an eye."† Such was his real estimate of the populace

* Letters to his Daughter, vol. iii. p. 244.

† Lord Brougham's Statesmen of the Time of George III, vol. i. p. 429.

whose voice he was ever proclaiming to be the voice of God.

Independence of mind he had none. He was content to live on other people's money from the beginning of his life to the end of it. He married a rich wife, when he was but just out of his teens, apparently only with the sordid view of spending her fortune as he did spend it. He then became a political adventurer, and sought to live upon the public. He contracted debts, not in the cause of the people, but for his own gratifications, and left it to his supporters to pay them. He accepted alms from a Ministry which he would willingly have overthrown. His cupidity alienated Horne Tooke and many others of his political friends. He owed it to fortune that he was at last enabled to close his life in what is called respectability, but he was even then so inconsiderate of his means that he died insolvent.

His literary qualifications have been extolled beyond their desert. He has been called a good classical scholar; but his reading in Latin was not extensive, and his knowledge of Greek was evidently slight. His editorship of Catullus and Theophrastus was merely nominal; such commendation as the volumes merit belongs to the printer. He seems to have been incapable of any sustained literary effort. After his professed determination to give a life and edition of Churchill and a life of Sterne, it might have been thought that very shame would have urged him to produce something of those works; but what he did for Churchill was nought, and Sterne he utterly neglected. Of his promised History of England no-

thing was written but a short introduction in praise of liberty and the Revolution. His few attempts at verse are poor and dry.

He had animal courage, as shown in his duels. He had the ready wit and aptitude for repartee which renders conversation agreeable. To a question of George III., he made one of the best repartees that ever were uttered. The King, when Wilkes came about the Court in his capacity of chamberlain, asked him one day how Alderman Townshend was. "Oh! please your Majesty," rejoined Wilkes, "I know nothing of him; he was a Wilkite, which your Majesty knows I never was." His retort to Lord Sandwich was scarcely less excellent, when, at one of the jollifications of a club at which they met, where all were speaking without restraint to each other, his lordship asked him whether he expected to die of the *lues Gallica* or by the halter. "That would much depend," replied Wilkes, "upon whether I should embrace your lordship's mistress or your lordship's principles." But with all his wit, and plausibility, and qualifications to please, his *molle atque facetum*, "all was false and hollow" in him; of honest principle he was void; and whatever good he did to the community was done from no desire for its good.

WILLIAM COBBETT

PREFACE.

THIS biography of William Cobbett is, it is hoped, better arranged and connected than any account of him that has yet been laid before the public. The 'Memoirs of Cobbett' by Robert Huish, in two volumes octavo, are ill digested, are not always to be trusted as to facts, and are swelled out with whole pages of unnecessary and unacknowledged transcription from periodical publications. The author, however, seems to have given considerable attention to Cobbett's sayings and doings, and I have occasionally quoted him. The anonymous 'Life of Cobbett,' in one volume duodecimo, published in 1835, is, though better written, very defective in its notices of many portions of his career.

Cobbett is well sketched in the 'Historical Characters' of Sir Henry Bulwer; but those who wish to have a full conception of his life and character must seek more detailed information respecting him.

J. S. W.

WILLIAM COBBETT.

CHAPTER I.

Birth of Cobbett—Employments of his boyhood—Reads 'The Tale of a Tub'—First direction of his thoughts to politics—Disappointed in his desire to become a sailor—Goes to London, and is employed in an attorney's office, where he improves himself in writing and spelling—Escapes from thence and enlists—His study of English grammar—His perseverance under difficulties—Goes with his regiment to New Brunswick—His behaviour, and promotion to be sergeant-major—Returns to England, and is granted his discharge, with a certificate of good conduct.

THE life of William Cobbett, as a political writer, is distinguishable into two entirely opposite parts, in which he appears in two entirely opposite characters. In the first part he was favourable to monarchy, and to George III. and his Government; and, in the second, set himself in hostility to all that bore rule in the English nation. How far he was sincere, either in support or attack, it is often difficult to determine; for such was his propensity to paper warfare, that he was always in quest of something to assail. Living in America in the early period of his career as an author,

he found an object for hostility in the American Government; and as the Americans were then at variance with England, he by consequence supported the English; but when he became a resident in England, he discovered reasons for defending and extolling the Americans, and directing all his energies against English authority. In reviewing his conduct and writings, we shall see much to admire in his displays of energy and decision, and his lucidity of thought and language in handling the subjects of which he treated; but we shall be too often under the necessity of questioning his veracity. We shall find him fertile in self-praise; and if we were to trust his enlargements on this subject, we should be obliged to think him almost faultless; but we must judge him out of other mouths than his own. His rise, by his own efforts, from the humblest condition, does him the highest honour; but many parts of his life, especially after his change of politics, present much matter for censure.

He was born on the 9th of March 1766, at a small farmhouse near Farnham, in Surrey, the birthplace and residence of his father and grandfather. His grandfather had been but a common day-labourer, fixed to the spot, having worked for the same farmer from the time of his marriage to that of his death. His father, though he held a piece of land, was very poor, but seems to have been intelligent, and, for a person of his condition, knowing. He had paid in his boyhood, with his scanty earnings in driving the plough, for evening tuition at a village school, and is said to have understood something of mathematics. His neighbours sometimes employed him in land-survey-

ing; and, being honest and steady, and having a well-conducted wife, he was held in much esteem.

William Cobbett was his father's third son. The eldest of his brothers became a shopkeeper, the second a farmer, and the youngest a soldier in the service of the East India Company. They were taught by their father, in the winter evenings, reading and writing in a humble way, and something of arithmetic; but in grammar, speaking himself ungrammatically, he could give them no instruction. Cobbett himself had some recollection of going to school to an old woman, who attempted to teach him his letters without success.

He was sent early to work in the fields, and said of himself that he did not remember the time when he did not do something towards earning his living. He trudged forth in the morning, with his satchel and wooden bottle, to scare the birds from the seed or corn, and returned home at night weary and exhausted. By degrees he grew strong enough to assist in ploughing and reaping; and his father used to boast that he had four boys, the eldest but fifteen years of age, who could do as much work as any three men in the parish.*

His employments on the farm, however, were not uninterrupted; nor was he so much attached to them but that he was willing at times, from a boyish desire for variety, to seek occupation elsewhere. "At eleven years of age," he relates, in a letter to the Reformers,† when he had grown ambitious of a seat in Parliament,

* Autobiography of Cobbett (a pamphlet), Hone, 1816.

† Letter in his 'Evening Post' on raising a fund for his standing for Coventry, Feb. 5, 1820; Huish, vol. i. p. 102; Life of Cobbett, 12mo, 1835.

"my employment was clipping of box edgings, and weeding beds of flowers, in the garden of the Bishop of Winchester at the castle of Farnham. I had always been fond of beautiful gardens; and a gardener, who had just come from the King's gardens at Kew, gave me such a description of them as made me instantly resolve to work in those gardens. The next morning, without saying a word to any one, off I set, with no clothes except those upon my back, and with thirteen halfpence in my pocket. I found that I must go to Richmond, and I accordingly went on from place to place, inquiring my way thither. A long day—it was in June—brought me to Richmond in the afternoon. Two pennyworth of bread and cheese, and a pennyworth of small beer, which I had on the road, and one halfpenny that I had lost somehow or other, left threepence in my pocket. With this for my whole fortune I was trudging through Richmond in my blue smock-frock, and my red garters tied under my knees, when, staring about me, my eye fell upon a little book in a bookseller's window, on the outside of which was written, 'THE TALE OF A TUB, price 3d.' The title was so odd that my curiosity was excited. I had the threepence, but then I could not have any supper. In I went and got the little book, which I was so impatient to read that I got over into a field at the upper corner of Kew Gardens, where there stood a haystack. On the shady side of this I sat down to read. The book was so different from anything that I had ever read before—it was something so new to my mind—that, though I could not understand some part of it, it delighted me beyond description, and it produced what I

have always considered a sort of birth of intellect. I read on until it was dark, without any thought of supper or bed. When I could see no longer, I put my little book in my pocket, and tumbled down by the side of the stack, where I slept till the birds in Kew Gardens awaked me in the morning, when off I started to Kew reading my little book. The singularity of my dress, the simplicity of my manner, my lively and confident air, and doubtless his own compassion besides, induced the gardener—who was a Scotchman, I remember—to give me victuals, find me lodging, and set me to work; and it was during the period that I was at Kew, that George IV. and two of his brothers laughed at the oddness of my dress, while I was sweeping the grass plot round the foot of the pagoda. The gardener, seeing me fond of books, lent me some gardening books to read; but these I could not relish after my 'Tale of a Tub,' which I carried about with me wherever I went; and when I, at about twenty years old, lost it in a box that fell overboard in the Bay of Fundy, in North America, the loss gave me greater pain than I have ever felt at losing thousands of pounds."

He does not tell us how long he stayed at Kew, or why he quitted it; but he never forgot the haystack; for having occasion, he said, many years afterwards, to go from Chelsea to Twickenham with two of his sons, he took them back through Kew, merely for the purpose of pointing out to them where the haystack had stood.

His thoughts were first directed to politics by listening to his father's disputes with a Scotch gardener named Martin, perhaps the one who had told him of

the wonders of Kew, about the American war; disputes in which his father took the side of the Americans, and wished success to Washington; and though often silenced by the Scotchman, who argued shrewdly in favour of the British, he would never acknowledge himself in the wrong.

Like other young men, Cobbett occasionally amused himself with cricket, following the hounds, and attendance at fairs; and in the latter part of the year 1782 he was sent to Portsmouth on a visit to a relation who resided there. Here he for the first time saw the sea, and was seized with a sudden longing to become a sailor. He had heard something of the great deeds of naval commanders, and began to meditate on the possibility of sharing in their glory. He lay awake all night thinking of seafaring adventures, and, rising at daylight, hurried off to the beach, and got into a boat that took him to the Pegasus man-of-war. He offered himself to the captain as a candidate for the employments of a sailor, but the captain, suspecting that he had run away from home, told him compassionately that he had better return and endure the labours of the farm, than subject himself to the hardships of a naval life. He then applied to the Port-Admiral to enrol him among those destined for the service; but the Admiral, hearing of the suspicions expressed by the captain of the Pegasus, thought them well grounded, and refused his request.*

He returned home in disappointment, and appears to have been thenceforth unstrung for farm labour. Previously he had taken delight in striving to surpass his

* Autobiography, 1816.

brothers and other competitors in their toils, but now he went to his work with indifference.

He remained at home, however, though dissatisfied with all around him, till the 6th of May in the following year, 1783. On the morning of that day he dressed himself in his best to accompany some friends to Guildford fair, whom he was to meet at a house about three miles from his home. On his way to the place appointed he had to cross the road to London, and as it happened, the stage-coach, speeding towards the city, was descending the hill at the foot of which he was passing. Till that moment, as he relates, the thought of going to London had never arisen in his mind, but when he saw the vehicle rattling cheerfully as it were along the road, he was seized with a sudden desire to leap upon it, and go with it whither it was going. He accordingly hailed the coachman, and, springing up, was set down at Ludgate Hill about nine o'clock in the evening. As he had more money in his pocket than he intended to spend at the fair, he was able to pay his passage; but when all the demands of his journey were settled, he was left with little more than half-a-crown.

He might consequently have found himself in difficulties in the metropolis, had it not been for one of the passengers by the coach, a hop-merchant in Southwark, who had had dealings with his father, and who, falling into conversation with him, discovered that he was venturing forth into the wilderness of the world without guide or compass. Being a father himself, and feeling concern for the lad's parents, he took him to his house, and sent notice to Farnham where the runaway was

sheltered, advising him at the same time to return home without delay. With this advice Cobbett refused to comply, but observes, in his account of the matter, that it was the first time that he had ever slighted his father, and that he had never ceased to feel concern for his disobedience. He felt, indeed, an inclination to return, and an assurance of his father's forgiveness, but he was afraid of the sneers of his acquaintance if he so soon reappeared among them. The father, however, did not show on the occasion the good sense for which Cobbett gives him credit; for he treated the letter of the good-natured hop-merchant with a contemptuous silence, seeming to think that, as his son had left his home of his own wilfulness, he might well leave him to make his way in the world by his own efforts. "This ungracious treatment on the part of the father," in the opinion of Mr Huish, "tended not a little to increase that sourness and acerbity of disposition which was in some degree natural to him, and which is so strikingly evinced in various parts of his writings, when he had to wield his favourite and irresistible weapons of sarcasm and personal invective."

His benefactor, finding the father inexorable and the son obstinate, thought of obtaining some employment for the fugitive in town; but the rusticity of his manners, and his deficiency in education, rendered this a matter of no small difficulty. He first ventured to recommend him to a linen-draper; but as he was dressed in a fustian jacket, a red plush waistcoat, tight breeches, and hobnailed shoes, with hair that looked as if it had never been combed, his application only excited the linen-draper's laughter, who told him that he had bet-

ter go back to the plough from whence he had come. Disappointed in this endeavour to serve him, the hop-merchant had determined to insert an advertisement for him in a newspaper, when he happened to be visited by an attorney named Holland, to whom he related young Cobbett's adventure; and it chanced that Holland was at that time in want, as Cobbett himself expresses it, "of an understrapping quill-driver." What could have induced an attorney, in however humble practice, to think of turning a lad of Cobbett's appearance and qualifications into a satisfactory clerk, it is not easy to determine. Perhaps something of shrewdness in the boy's answers to the questions put to him may have been an inducement. Certain it is that he took him, and seated him on the following day at a desk in a dark chamber in Gray's Inn Lane.

The youth could write a legible sort of hand, but was terribly deficient in the art of spelling, and totally inexperienced in reading such hands as those which Mr Holland placed before him. For the first two months, therefore, he was unable to copy anything without constant assistance from his employer, who must have had an extraordinary degree of patience with him. But he seems to have applied himself to the work doggedly, though with unwillingness; perhaps in the consciousness that he was daily improving himself in writing and increasing his knowledge of language. At length he began to be useful, and was told by Mr Holland that he was very well satisfied with him; but Cobbett himself was growing utterly disgusted with the occupation. Writing to one of his brothers during his clerkship, he says, "I am in an

earthly hell. If you feel that you have any roguery in you, and have a disposition to exercise it to its full extent, put yourself at the top of a coach, as I did, and make the best of your way to London. I could point out to you many places where you can practise roguery to perfection; but stop nowhere: get into an attorney's office as soon as you can, and you will have plenty of scope for your abilities. You may now and then have something to do with wit; but it is only writing Surrey 'to wit,' or Middlesex 'to wit.' If you think that you have any tenderness of conscience about you, for God's sake leave it behind you; it is of no use at all in an attorney's office; and try as much as you can to obliterate from your mind all the fusty antiquated notions about the responsibility of an oath: it is a most easy and convenient method of getting over a difficulty or a mistake; but perjury is not the only dirty place which attorneys wade through to obtain their unhallowed gains." This passage from his correspondence, printed by Mr Huish, shows, if given as he wrote it, that he was beginning to exercise those powers of thought and expression by which he was afterwards so much distinguished. Giving an account, in after life, of the way in which he was then occupied, he says: "No part of my life has been totally unattended with pleasure except the eight or nine months I passed in Gray's Inn. The office, for so the dungeon was called where I wrote, was so dark that on cloudy days we were obliged to burn candles. I worked like a galley-slave from five in the morning till eight or nine at night, and sometimes all night long. . . . When I think of the *saids* and *so forths*, and the counts of tautology that I

scribbled over; when I think of those sheets of seventy-two words, and those lines two inches apart,—my brain turns. Gracious heaven! if I am doomed to be wretched, bury me beneath Iceland snows, and let me feed on blubber; stretch me under the burning line, and deny me thy propitious dews; nay, if it be thy will, suffocate me with the infected and pestilential air of a democratic club-room,—but save me, save me from the desk of an attorney!" *

On Sundays he often took a stroll in St James's Park, and cast his eye on one occasion on an advertisement inviting loyal young men, desirous of glory and riches, to enter his Majesty's marine service, and hasten to enrol themselves in the Chatham division. Having still, it seems, some desire to go to sea, he resolved to join that corps, and hurried off to Chatham to enlist at once. He enlisted, but found himself, on the following morning, not a marine, but a foot-soldier in a marching regiment, to whose quarters he had gone by mistake. But it was out of his power to make a change; and the captain, a jesting Irishman, congratulated him on having escaped sea-service, telling him that his regiment, one of the boldest and bravest in the army, was then stationed in Nova Scotia, which he would find, on reaching it, a real paradise. Whether he took any leave of the attorney or the benevolent hop-merchant, or thanked them in any way for what they had done for him, we are nowhere told; but it is clear that he owed them some acknowledgments; for even the instruction of the attorney, though given from interested motives, was carefully and patiently

* Autobiography, 1816.

imparted, and greatly assisted him in mastering his own language.

Nor does he tell how he liked drilling as a recruit; but he seems to have submitted to military discipline with the same resolution with which he had applied himself to legal transcription. The country being at peace, the Government were in no haste to send off recruits to their several regiments; and Cobbett was consequently left for more than a year at Chatham, where he took his turn in the duty of the garrison. His time of leisure, which was considerable, he spent, not in the ordinary dissipation or trifling of soldiers, but in reading whatever books he could procure; and he used to say that he learned more during the year that he remained at Chatham than he had ever learned before. A circulating library at Brompton, to which he had money enough to subscribe, afforded him a miscellaneous supply of novels, history, poetry, plays, and travels, all of which were new to him, and were all read with avidity.

The librarian of Brompton had a good-looking daughter, who attended in the shop, and often gave Cobbett the volumes which he wanted; and the young soldier, whose imagination was excited by the novels that he read, began to fancy, from the civility that she always showed him, that she was in love with his regimentals; but just as he was summoning resolution to ask her to be his wife, his dreams were dispelled by seeing in a newspaper that she was married to a stationer in London.

His thoughts of the fair one being at an end, he resolved to apply himself more closely to regular

study, as far as was practicable in his condition. When he attempted to write, he found himself often at a stand for want of grammatical knowledge, a want which he had experienced in the office of Mr Holland, and which he now set himself resolutely to supply. His ability to write a legible hand had brought him under the notice of Colonel Debeig, the commandant of the garrison, who employed him in copying various documents, and especially a long correspondence between himself and the Duke of Richmond. But in this occupation he often made mistakes, from his uncertainty in the construction of sentences; and the Colonel, perceiving his deficiency, recommended him to study grammar, making his advice a kind of injunction, and promising him a reward for fair proficiency. He in consequence procured Lowth's English Grammar, and set himself diligently to the study of it; but as the grammatical terms, and the language of the book in general, were new to him, it was some time before he made much progress. But he took great pains to master it. He wrote out the whole of it more than once; he gradually got it by heart; he repeated portions of it morning and evening; and he imposed on himself the task of saying it from beginning to end every time he mounted guard. To this exercise of his memory he attributed its subsequent retentiveness, and much of his success in acquiring such knowledge as he possessed.*

His general conduct, as might be expected from one so devoted to books, was steady and regular. He was always sober and punctual to the moment of drill, and,

* Autobiography, 1816.

being intelligent, incurred none of those censures or penalties by which recruits are often rendered discontented. But towards his parents he seems to have been unfeeling. His father, it is said, had relented, and sent him several letters while he was at Chatham, pressing him to leave the service, saying that the last hay-rick or pocket of hops at Farnham should be sold to procure his discharge, and offering entire forgiveness if he would return. But to all these expressions of kindness Cobbett was deaf and silent. His whole time and thoughts seem to have been occupied in his grammar and his military occupations.*

His exactness in the performance of his duties soon procured him promotion to the rank of corporal; and he observes that "there is no situation where merit is so sure to meet with its reward as in a well-disciplined army; those who command are obliged to reward it, for their own ease and comfort." This is true in reference to the private soldier, as far as advancement to the post of sergeant-major is concerned, but of elevation beyond that point he has no hope.

The study of grammar he extols till his reader is weary of hearing its praises, yet his earnestness is somewhat excusable in a man who, brought up illiterate, attained all his knowledge of books, and a vigorous use of his pen, by his own efforts. "Without a knowledge of grammar," he remarks, "it is impossible to write correctly, and it is by mere accident if the person speaks correctly; and it should be remembered that all well-informed persons judge of a man's mind

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. i. p. 27, 29.

by his writing and speaking."* His account of his pursuit of grammar under difficulties has been often reprinted, yet a biographer of Cobbett cannot give a just notion of his industry without producing it once more. "I learned grammar," says he,† "when I was a private soldier, on the pay of sixpence a-day. The edge of my berth, or that of my guard-bed, was my seat to study on; my knapsack was my book-case; a bit of board lying on my lap was my writing-table. . . . I had no money to purchase candle or oil. In winter time it was rarely that I could get any light but that of the fire, and only my *turn* even of that. And if I, under such circumstances, and without parent or friend to advise or encourage me, accomplished the undertaking, what excuse can there be for any youth, however poor, however pressed with business, or however circumstanced as to room or other conveniences? To buy a pen or a sheet of paper I was compelled to forego some portion of food, though in a state of half-starvation. I had no moment of time that I could call my own; and I had to read and write amid the talking, laughing, singing, whistling, and brawling of at least half-a-score of the most thoughtless of men, and that, too, in their hours of freedom from all control. Think not lightly of the farthing that I had to give now and then for ink, pen, and paper. That farthing, alas! was a *great* sum to me. I was as tall as I am now; I had great health and great exercise. The whole of the money not expended for us at market was *two-pence* a-week for each man. I remember, and well I

* Advice to Young Men, p. 48. † Ibid., p. 49.

may, that upon one occasion, I, after all absolutely necessary expenses, had on Friday made shift to have a halfpenny in reserve, which I had destined for the purchase of a red herring in the morning; but when I pulled off my clothes at night, so hungry then as scarcely to be able to endure life, I found that I *had lost my halfpenny.* I buried my head under the miserable sheet and rug and cried like a child. And, again I say, if I, under circumstances like those, could encounter and overcome the task, is there, can there be, in the whole world, a youth to find an excuse for the non-performance? What youth, who shall read this, will not be ashamed to say that he is not able to find time and opportunity for this most essential of all the branches of book-learning?"

It was during his stay at Chatham that he had a ludicrous adventure with a troublesome landlady, which he thus relates: "When I had the honour to serve his Majesty, I was with seven of my comrades quartered upon a most bitter vixen of a landlady. One evening, when we had invested her fireside pretty closely, she began to abuse us in a way that put me in mind of Fielding's Mrs Tow-wouse, to whom she bore no weak resemblance. As it happened, I had an old torn copy of 'Joseph Andrews,' which I fetched down-stairs. I began with a loud voice to read the description of the termagant in the romance, but before I had half done, the landlady flew across the half-moon that we had formed round her fire, and, fixing one claw in my hair and the other in the book, began to pull and tear like a fury, swearing all the while that she would have me flogged for a libel. With some difficulty I dis-

entangled myself from her clutches, and endeavoured to smooth her down, by convincing her that it was a printed book I was reading—a book, too, that was made probably before she was born, and that, of course, it could not be *her* that I was reading about. 'You lie, you young dog!' says she; 'it was *about me*, it was *about me*, and about nobody else.' And she actually went and complained of me to the commanding officer, telling him that I sat in her presence reading a nasty, lying book, that abused her and all the *genteel* women in the parish. The colonel sent for me, and having obtained an explanation of the business, gave me a piece of advice. . . . 'Very well, Cobbett,' says he, 'I am glad to find you are in no fault; but you are a young soldier, Cobbett, and if you like feather-beds better than straw, and strong beer better than small, and if you would rather have a smack from a landlady's lips than from her fist, let me advise you always to examine her features well before you read to her the description of Mrs Tow-wouse.'"*

At length the time came when the regiment to which he belonged was sent off from Chatham, where it had been stationed about a year, to Nova Scotia, from whence, in a few weeks, it was ordered to St John's, in the province of New Brunswick. In that town, and other parts of the same province, it remained till it was relieved and sent home in September 1791.

His conduct in America continued to be good, and his general merits were so highly estimated, that he was promoted from the rank of corporal to that of sergeant-major, without being detained in that of ser-

* Huish, vol. i. p. 227.

geant, but being raised over the heads of thirty sergeants. In this post his knowledge of grammar, as he expresses it, proved of eminent advantage to him. "How often did I experience the value of that knowledge," he exclaims, "even long before I became what is called an author! The adjutant, under whom it was my duty to act when I was sergeant-major, was, as almost all military officers are, or at least *were*, a very illiterate man, and, perceiving that every sentence of mine was in the same form and manner as sentences in print, he became shy of letting me see pieces of *his* writing. The writing of orders and other things therefore fell to me; and thus, though no nominal addition was made to my pay, and no nominal addition to my authority, I acquired the latter as effectually as if a law had been passed to confer it upon me." *

In his 'Advice to Young Men' (p. 42), speaking of the benefits of early rising, he tells us how he carried himself in his office, and how he gained the esteem of officers and men. "I was *always ready*. If I had to mount guard at *ten*, I was ready at *nine*; never did any man or anything wait for me one moment. Being, at an age under twenty years, raised from corporal to sergeant-major at once, over the heads of thirty sergeants, I naturally should have been an object of envy and hatred; but this habit of early rising and of rigid adherence to the precepts now inculcated, really subdued those passions, because every one felt that what I did he had never done and never could do. Before my promotion, a clerk was wanted to make out the morning report of the regiment. I rendered the clerk

* Advice to Young Men, p. 53.

unnecessary; and, long before any other man was dressed for the parade, my work for the morning was all done, and I myself was on the parade walking in fine weather perhaps for an hour. My custom was this: to get up in summer at daylight, and in winter at four o'clock, shave, dress, even to the putting on my sword-belt over my shoulder, and having my sword lying on the table before me, ready to hang by my side; then I ate a bit of cheese, or pork, and bread; then I prepared my report, which was filled up as fast as the companies brought me in the materials. After this I had an hour or two to read before the time came for any duty out of doors, unless when the regiment or part of it went out to exercise in the morning. When this was the case, and the matter left to me, I always had it on the ground in such time that the bayonets glittered in the rising sun. . . . If the officers were to go out, eight or ten o'clock was the hour, sweating the men in the heat of the day, breaking in upon the time of cooking their dinner, putting all things out of order, and everybody out of humour. When I was the commander, the men had a long day of leisure before them; they could ramble into the town or into the woods, go to get raspberries, to catch birds, to catch fish, or to pursue any other recreation; and such of them as chose, and were qualified, were allowed to work at their trades. So that here, arising solely from the early habits of one young man, were pleasant and happy days given to hundreds."

Such is Cobbett's own account of the manner in which he fulfilled his duties; and, though he was extremely prone to exaggerate when speaking of his own

merits, there is nothing on record to invalidate his statement, but much to confirm it; for, on applying for his discharge when he arrived at Portsmouth, he was at once granted it, "in consideration," as the document stated, "of his good behaviour, and the services he had rendered his regiment." The following order was at the same time issued at Portsmouth by General Frederick, the colonel of the regiment, of which Lord Edward Fitzgerald was major:—

"PORTSMOUTH, 19*th Dec.* 1791.

"Sergeant-major Cobbett having most pressingly applied for his discharge, at Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald's request General Frederick has ordered Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald to return the Sergeant-major thanks for his behaviour and conduct during the time of his being in the regiment, and Major Lord Edward adds his most hearty thanks to those of the General."

CHAPTER II.

Accuses certain officers of his late regiment of peculation, and procures a court-martial to be held on them—His correspondence with the War Office preparatory to the trial—Fails to appear as prosecutor—Legal opinions respecting his defalcation—Goes off to France—His marriage—Account of his wife—Was previously almost induced to settle in America—His residence in France, and departure for America.

YET it appears that Sergeant-major Cobbett, for some time before he left the regiment, had been out of favour with several of the officers. He had thrown out intimations, in what form it is not recorded, that certain of them had been guilty of great dishonesty, in having drawn money for pay and clothing, during many months, for men who, though named on the regimental books, had in reality no existence; and, after his discharge, he laid before the Government formal accusations on these points against four of them, Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce, Captain Richard Powell, Lieutenant Christopher Seton, and Lieutenant John Hall; and upon these officers it was consequently appointed that a court-martial should be held. As this is a matter affecting Cobbett on which all who have written of him touch but lightly, and as he himself kept deep silence concerning it in his pamphlet of Autobiography published in 1816, it will be necessary for us to bestow a little careful examination on it. The writer of the

notice of Cobbett in Knight's 'Biographical Dictionary' calls it an affair of which no intelligible explanation has ever been given; but there is a full account of the preparations for the court-martial, and their termination, published in 1809,* from which pretty sure conjectures may be drawn regarding the causes of the result. Hitherto Cobbett's character for honesty had been unscathed; but from this transaction it receives no small portion of tarnish.

Some time before the 5th of February 1792, it was signified by Sir George Yonge, the Secretary at War, to Sir Charles Gould, the Judge-Advocate-General, that the late sergeant-major of the 54th Regiment had preferred an accusation of seventeen charges against the officers above named; and a copy of these charges was accordingly sent to all of them except Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce, who had fallen ill, and who died before the arrangements for the court-martial were completed. The Judge-Advocate also inquired of Cobbett what witnesses he would wish to have officially summoned, and gave him notice at the same time that the court would be held either at Portsmouth or at Hillsea Barracks. Cobbett replied, in a letter dated from No. 3 Felix Street, Lambeth, Feb. 25, that he would have sent the names of his witnesses at once, but that he must first remonstrate against the holding of the court at Portsmouth. After observing that he had fixed himself in London for the purpose of prosecuting the affair, he says: "I have no other views, sir, in this undertaking, than such as arise from a desire to render my country and the army a

* 'Proceedings of a General Court-Martial for the Trial of Captain Richard Powell,' &c. J. Gold, Shoe Lane, 1809.

service; and being well convinced of the goodness of my cause, all I wish for is a fair and impartial trial. But this, I freely declare, I cannot expect at Portsmouth or Hillsea: there the regiment is quartered; there the accused must have formed connections; and there all the witnesses I may call upon will be totally in their power. I certainly am entitled to his Majesty's protection on this occasion. In London I should think myself perfectly safe, and should give my evidence without fear. At Portsmouth I shall be a friendless, unsupported individual, surrounded with a host of enemies, and I should look upon my life as being in danger." He therefore entreated Sir Charles Gould to submit to his Majesty his humble petition that the court might be held in London. Sir Charles complied with Cobbett's request, and his Majesty's permission was obtained for the court to be held at the Horse Guards, though the accused expressed some dissatisfaction at the change, on account of the expense that they must incur by travelling, and lodging in London, and bringing the witnesses thither for their defence, remarking that they were soldiers of fortune, but not men of fortune; but Cobbett, in another letter to Sir Charles Gould, observed that to speak of expense in bringing up witnesses was a "most ingenious objection," for the proceeding would be attended with neither expense nor inconvenience to anybody but the publicans on whom the witnesses would be quartered on their march.

Being asked by Sir Charles what documents he would require to be produced from the regiment in support of his accusations, he said that he must have

all the muster-rolls and accounts for the last four years; all the clothing returns and certificates for three years; all lists, signed by Captain Powell, of the non-commissioned officers and men who were paid for the clothing of 1789 and 1790; and several books kept by the quartermaster and others. The names of his witnesses he begged leave to withhold till the latest possible day, lest he should "subject the poor fellows to unmerciful treatment," having reason to believe that the commanding officer of the regiment was espousing the cause of the accused. "If my accusation is without foundation," he added, in his strong language—which, as Sir Charles Gould afterwards observed, "seemed rather unnecessary and rather eccentric"—"the authors of cruelty have not yet devised the tortures I ought to endure. Hell itself, as painted by the most fiery bigot, would be too mild a punishment for me. I come forward in this business with the best grace that can possibly accompany a man's actions. If I were not always a steady assertor of the soldier's rights; if I were not always an opposer of the depredations on the soldier and the public; and if my practice did not always agree with my profession; if any man can prove that I ever cheated him of a farthing, or ever winked at such practices in any one else, I will say that I am a villain, and that the officers that I accuse are good and virtuous men." At length, on the 19th of March, when the nomination of his witnesses could no longer be withheld, he sent the Judge-Advocate a list of them, consisting of Major Lord Edward Fitzgerald, the present and former agents of the regiment, and forty-seven private soldiers who had been with the regiment

in America. At the same time he stated that "a private concern obliged him to go into the country, from which he could not conveniently return till Friday the 23d, but that commands for him would be forwarded if left where his letters had hitherto been addressed;" namely, at No. 3 Felix Street, Lambeth.

To that place, accordingly, notice was sent to Cobbett that the court-martial would be held at the Horse Guards, on Saturday the 24th day of March; and on that day the court assembled, consisting of Major-General Crosbie as president, and sixteen other officers of high rank. It was charged against Captain Powell that he misapplied work-money earned by the non-commissioned officers and men; against Lieutenant Hall, that he had made unlawful deductions from the men's pay; and against Lieutenant Seton, that he had joined with the other two in making false musters. Inquiry being made whether the prosecutor and defendants were in attendance, it was announced that William Cobbett, who had preferred these charges, and who had engaged to support them by proper evidence, had not yet arrived. The court waited an hour for his appearance, and then despatched a messenger to Felix Street in quest of him, who, on his return, reported that William Cobbett was not to be found, but had removed from his lodgings in Lambeth on the preceding Wednesday, the day on which he had written his last letter to Sir Charles Gould, since which time the people of the house had neither seen nor heard of him; nor had he left any intimation whither he had removed.

On receiving this unexpected intelligence, the members of the court agreed to adjourn till the following

Tuesday morning, to give time for inquiry into the cause of Cobbett's non-appearance. A notice of the adjournment was sent to Cobbett, addressed to Felix Street, and a duplicate of it to a house in Houndsditch, where it was found, by inquiries of the postman, that letters might be left for him. A note of inquiry was also sent to Captain Lane, an officer of the 54th Regiment, who was said to have "sometimes visited" Cobbett at his lodgings in Felix Street, and who had a house in Sloane Square, Chelsea; but the reply was that neither the captain nor his servant knew whither Cobbett had removed, and that the captain was surprised at his non-attendance at the court. The court met again on the day appointed, and as Cobbett still stayed away, Elizabeth Wools, the landlady of the house in Felix Street, who had consented to appear before the court, was called in, and stated on oath, that Cobbett had lodged with her and her husband, who was a hoopmaker, nearly twelve weeks; that he had left their house on the preceding Wednesday evening, saying that he was going to his father who was very ill, but that he would see her again in two or three days, not to lodge with her again, but merely to call on her; that since that time she had neither seen nor heard of him, nor did she know where he was, but had been told by the postman that his letters were to be sent to Houndsditch. Being asked whether Cobbett had been visited by many persons during his residence at her house, she replied that he had been visited by three persons only; by a Mr Green, who brought him books to read; by Captain Lane; and by a man named Austin, whom she understood to be a sergeant of the

54th Regiment. Being further asked whether Captain Lane had often visited Cobbett, and whether he had been with him lately, she answered that Captain Lane had not come frequently, and that the last time he came was on the Monday preceding the Wednesday on which Cobbett went away. She then produced three letters addressed to Cobbett, one of which was that containing the notice of the adjournment of the court.

As the court could no longer expect that Cobbett would appear, but saw reason to suppose that he purposely absented and concealed himself, and as the witnesses had now been detained three days, it was thought proper to put the defendants on their trial without delay; and the accusations against each of them were formally read, a pause being made after each to allow any person to come forward in support of any or all of the several charges. But as no one tendered evidence, or made any remark concerning them, the court immediately proceeded to pass sentence, and declared the three defendants honourably acquitted, as the several charges must be considered wholly unfounded.

Sir Charles Gould, in acquainting Major-General Crosbie that the proceedings of the court-martial had received his Majesty's approbation, added: "I have reason to think something more effectual towards vindicating the character of the officers will be attempted, if, upon consulting the Crown officers, it shall appear practicable in this case; namely, a prosecution of Cobbett, who, as far as in him lay, made a mockery of public justice, and availed himself of a judicial process for the conveyance of the most gross slander." And

General Frederick, in a letter to Sir Charles Gould, said he had not the least doubt that the officers would have acquitted themselves, and "that the intended prosecutor would not have been able to have substantiated any one of the charges he had alleged against them."

The case was laid before the Attorney and Solicitor General, Sir John Scott and Sir John Mitford, and their opinion was asked whether Cobbett could be criminally prosecuted for his conduct; and the answer was, that unless he could be proved to have conspired with others to prefer the charges maliciously, he could not be criminally prosecuted, but that actions might be maintained against him on the case by each of the three officers.

The officers accordingly, it is said, determined to proceed against him, if he could be discovered; and at length, after sending out several emissaries, they received information that he was living in concealment with his family at Farnham; and, for the purpose of bringing him to light, they despatched thither, in the guise of a beggar, a private of the name of Johnson, who bore Cobbett a grudge for having once procured him a flogging. The pretended beggar arrived at old Cobbett's house just as the family were sitting down to dinner. Cobbett recognised him in spite of his garb, and at once divined his object; but not letting him see that he was detected, he called him in, ordered some bread and cheese and beer for him, and kept him in conversation until one of his brothers, to whom he had whispered a word or two, brought in a constable. To this functionary Cobbett gave the man in charge, declaring him to be a deserter, with evidence upon his

back of the lashes that he had received when Cobbett himself was sergeant-major of his regiment. Johnson in vain protested that he was no deserter; he was stripped, and the marks of flogging on his back were so plain, that the constable had no hesitation in taking him into custody, and confining him till notice of his arrest could be sent to his regiment.*

By this ruse Cobbett was enabled to make his escape; and he thought it prudent to leave England. He therefore hastened off to the coast, and reached the shores of France before the month of March was ended; and in that country he continued till the following September.

That he had taken shelter with his parents on fleeing from London, may excite some surprise; for, according to Mr Huish, he had treated them with great neglect. On landing at Portsmouth from America, he says, Cobbett did not direct his first steps towards Farnham, but went immediately to the metropolis, "not seeming to care whether he had a father or brother alive."

About a month before he left England he had married. His wife's maiden name he does not tell us; but she was the daughter of a sergeant of artillery, whom he met in Canada, and he chose her for his consort when she was of very tender age. The passage in his 'Advice to Young Men' (p. 104), in which he tells the story of his love, has always been much admired for its pleasing and graceful style. "When I first saw my wife," he says, "she was *thirteen years old*, and I was within about a month of *twenty-one*. She was the daugh-

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. i. p. 84.

ter of a sergeant of artillery, and I was the sergeant-major of a regiment of foot, both stationed in forts near the city of St John, in the province of New Brunswick. I sat in the same room with her for about an hour, in company with others, and I made up my mind that she was the very girl for me. That I thought her beautiful is certain, for that I had always said should be an indispensable qualification; but I saw in her what I deemed marks of . . . sobriety of conduct, . . . which has been by far the greatest blessing of my life. It was now dead of winter, and of course the snow was several feet deep upon the ground, and the weather piercing cold. It was my habit, when I had done my morning's writing, to go out at break of day to take a walk on a hill at the foot of which our barracks lay. In about three mornings after I had first seen her, I had, by an invitation to breakfast with me, got up two young men to join me in my walk; and our road lay by the house of her father and mother. It was hardly light, but she was out on the snow, scrubbing out a washing-tub. 'That's the girl for me,' said I, when we had got out of her hearing. . . . From the day that I first spoke to her, I never had a thought of her ever being the wife of any other man, more than I had a thought of her being transformed into a chest of drawers; and I formed my resolution at once, to marry her as soon as we could get permission, and to get out of the army as soon as I could. So that this matter was at once as finally settled as if written in the book of fate. At the end of about six months, my regiment, and I along with it, were removed to Frederickton, a distance of a *hundred miles* up the river of St John; and, what was

worse, the artillery were expected to go off to England a year or two before our regiment. The artillery went, and she along with them; and now it was that I acted a part becoming a real and sensible lover. I was aware that when she got to that gay place Woolwich, the house of her father and mother, necessarily visited by numerous persons not the most select, might become unpleasant to her; and I did not like, besides, that she should continue *to work hard.* I had saved *a hundred and fifty guineas,* the earnings of my early hours, in writing for the paymaster, the quartermaster, and others, in addition to the savings of my own pay. *I sent her all my money* before she sailed; and wrote to her to beg of her, if she found her home uncomfortable, to hire a lodging with respectable people, and at any rate, not to spare the money, but to buy herself good clothes, and to live without hard work until I arrived in England; and I, in order to induce her to lay out the money, told her that I should get plenty more before I came home. As the malignity of the devil would have it, we were kept abroad *two years longer* than our time, Mr Pitt (England not being so tame then as she is now) having knocked up a dust with Spain about Nootka Sound. . . . At the end of *four years,* however, home I came, landed at Portsmouth, and got my discharge from the army by the great kindness of poor Lord Edward Fitzgerald, who was then the major of my regiment. I found my little girl *a servant of all work* (and hard work it was) at *five pounds a-year,* in the house of a Captain Brisac; and without hardly saying a word about the matter, she put into my hands *the whole of my hundred and fifty guineas unbroken.*"

There was a time, however, when his relations with the intended Mrs Cobbett were in danger of being broken off. One day he had rambled into the woods, on the banks of a creek connected with the river St John, and, being tired, had sought shelter in a house which proved to be that of a Yankee royalist, who had accepted a grant of land in the province from the English Government. Here he found a master and mistress, resembling an English farmer and his wife, two stout sons, and a daughter of the age of nineteen, to whom he at once felt a strong attraction. He visited this house for two whole years, never speaking to the young woman of marriage, but always being treated by the family as if they would have been glad to see him become her husband. She was fair, and the girl at Woolwich was brown, and Cobbett seems to have given the fair one the preference as to personal appearance; nor could he bear to see any attention paid her by any other young man. His parting from the family was painful to himself and them. But we cannot forbear to transcribe his own reflections on the separation. He was guilty, he remarks, of no deception; "but still," he says, "I ought not to have suffered even the most distant hope to be entertained by a person so innocent, so amiable, for whom I had so much affection, and to whose heart I had no right to give a single twinge. I ought from the very first to have prevented the possibility of her ever feeling pain on my account. I was young, to be sure, but I was old enough to know what was my duty in this case, and I ought, dismissing my own feelings, to have had the resolution to perform it." But, he proceeds, "on what trifles turn the great

events in the life of man. If I had received a *cool* letter from my intended wife; if I had only heard a rumour of anything from which fickleness in her might have been inferred; if I had found in her any, even the smallest, abatement of affection; if she had but let go any one of the hundred strings by which she held my heart;—if any of these, never would the world have heard of me. Young as I was, able as I was as a soldier, proud as I was of the admiration and commendations of which I was the object; fond as I was, too, of the command which, at so early an age, my rare conduct and great natural talents had given me; sanguine as was my mind, and brilliant as were my prospects;—yet I had seen so much of the meannesses, the unjust partialities, the insolent pomposity, the disgusting dissipations of that way of life, that I was weary of it: I longed exchanging my fine laced coat for the Yankee farmer's homespun, to be where I should never behold the supple crouch of servility, and never hear the hectoring voice of authority, again; and, on the lonely banks of this branch-covered creek, which contained (she out of the question) everything congenial to taste and dear to my heart, I, unapplauded, unfeared, unenvied, and uncalumniated, should have lived and died."*

The writer of a notice of Cobbett's life in one of the magazines, written shortly after his death, remarked that he was under great self-delusion when he thought that he could have rested content on the banks of an obscure American creek, or in any place where he would have had no opportunities for strife.

* Advice to Young Men, p. 153.

Yet, as the strife in which he was to engage was that of the pen—as he had not yet felt his strength as a writer—as he had always a strong attachment to his original employment of farming—and, as, notwithstanding his pugnacious propensities, he set a great value on the enjoyments of home—it may be questioned whether, if he had once settled down on a Canadian farmstead, and grown, in the society of a pleasing wife, interested in its occupations, he might not have remained there so long that his literary powers and dispositions, having found no opportunity for exerting themselves, would have decayed within him, remaining inactive till it would have been too late for them to germinate.

On the good qualities of her who became his wife, he bestowed, at a later period of his life, the following praises: "Love," says he, "gave me for my leisure hours a companion, who, though deprived of all opportunity of acquiring *what is called learning*, had so much good sense, so much useful knowledge, was so innocent, so just in all her ways, so pure in thought, word, deed, so disinterested, so generous, so devoted to me and her children, so free from all disguise, and, withal, so beautiful and so talkative, and in a voice so sweet, so cheering, that I must, seeing the health and the capacity which it had pleased God to give me, have been *a criminal* if I had done much less than that which I have done; and I have always said that if my country feel any gratitude for my labours, that gratitude is due to her full as much as to me." *

Having gone over, as we have seen, to France, he fixed his residence, with his wife, at a little village

* Advice to Young Men, p. 207.

called Tilq, near St Omer's, where he remained till August, and then set out for Paris, intending to spend the winter there; but when he had reached Abbeville, on the 11th of that month, he heard of the deposition of the King and the massacre of his Guards. As he saw, therefore, that he would be exposed to trouble in that city, and knew that a war with England was likely, through which he might be detained a prisoner, he turned off to Havre de Grace, from whence he set sail for America on the 1st of September. His experience of the French people, during his stay among them, was, he tells us, very agreeable, for he found them, "except those who were blasted with the principles of *the accursed Revolution*," honest, pious, and kind to excess. "People may say what they please," he observes,* "about the misery of the French people under the old government. I have conversed with thousands of them, not one of whom did not regret the change. I have not room to go into an inquiry into the causes that have led these people to become the passive instruments, the slaves of a set of tyrants, such as the world never saw before; but I venture to predict that sooner or later they will return to the form of government *under which they were happy, and under which alone they can ever be happy again.*" Here he speaks as an ardent lover of monarchy and monarchical institutions, and might seem to have been filled with the spirit of prophecy.

* Autobiography, 1816.

CHAPTER III.

Settles at Philadelphia—His occupation—States that he had a letter of recommendation to Jefferson—His first essay in political writing in an attack on Dr Priestley—Fable in the style of Swift—His denunciation of political reformers—Other political pamphlets—His profits from them, and quarrel with his publisher Bradford—Resolves to become a bookseller at Philadelphia—Considerations as to the means by which he may have acquired money for the undertaking.

LANDING at Philadelphia in October, he proceeded to Wilmington on the Delaware, where he found numbers of French emigrants, who were much in want of somebody to teach them English; and as, during his residence in France, he had acquired sufficient knowledge of that language for communicating with French people, he obtained a great number of pupils. He did not, however, as it appears, remain long at Wilmington, but removed to Philadelphia, twenty-eight miles distant, and took "a very good house, No. 8 Calton Hill," teaching English to "the most respectable Frenchmen in the city," so that he "earned about 140 dollars a-month," and continued to do so "for about two years and a half." *

Soon after his arrival in America, he sent, he says, to Mr Jefferson, who was then Secretary of State, a

* Political Censor, cited by Huish, vol. i. p. 137; Preface to Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, p. 7.

letter of recommendation which he had received, as he stated, from Mr Adams, the American ambassador at the Hague, to whom he had been recommended by a Mr Short. But of the mode in which this letter was obtained he gives no account; and Mr Huish speaks of the letter in such a manner as to raise great doubt whether it ever had being, and whether Mr Short was not a fiction of Cobbett's brain. Cobbett himself never visited the Hague; for he never left France from the time that he settled there in March 1792 till his departure from thence for America in the following September; but if he really received such a letter, it would have been easy for him, when any question was asked respecting it, to show through what channel it came to him. However, he produced the following answer to it, as received from Mr Jefferson:—

"PHILADELPHIA, *Nov.* 5, 1792.

"SIR,—In acknowledging the receipt of your favour of the 2d instant, I wish it were in my power to announce to you any way in which I could be useful to you. Mr Short's assurances of your merit would be a sufficient inducement to me. Public offices in our government are so few, and of so little value, as to offer no resource to talent. When you shall have been here some small time, you will be able to judge in what way you can set out with the best prospect of success, and if I can serve you in it, I shall be very happy to do it.—I am, sir, your very humble servant,

"THOMAS JEFFERSON."

But of the authenticity of this letter from Jefferson great doubts were expressed, and Cobbett manifested

extreme anxiety to remove them. He declared that he had shown the original to more than fifty gentlemen of the city of Philadelphia, and that it might be seen at any time by any person of credit who might wish for a sight of it. There is something in such a declaration, remarks Mr Huish, that at once begets in the mind of the reader a suspicion of the letter's genuineness: for why should he show a letter to fifty gentlemen, or leave it for the inspection of persons of credit, if there were no ground for doubt respecting it; or why should he have entered on the defence of it at all? Nor does he name any one of the fifty gentlemen of Philadelphia to whom he showed it; the only person whom he names as having seen it is a Mr Ketletas, an inhabitant, not of Philadelphia, but of New York. So the matter must rest, there being no proof of the letter to Jefferson having existed, or of the letter from Jefferson being genuine, but Cobbett's own assertions.*

He remained nearly two years in America before he tried his hand at any political essay. But in the year 1794, in the month of June, there came over from England to America the Unitarian philosopher Dr Priestley, whose house at Birmingham had recently been burned by a loyal mob. As a man of learning and science, Priestley was far superior to Cobbett, either at that or any subsequent period of his life; but as a meddler in politics, and a disseminator of democratic principles, he had done and said much that justly exposed him to the animadversions of all who held the opinions concerning government that Cobbett then professed. Priestley, on his landing, had received

* Cobbett's Autobiography, 1816, p. 10; Huish, vol. i. p. 106.

several addresses from political societies, and in his answers to them had uttered observations condemnatory of the English form of government. Cobbett in consequence proceeded to compose a pamphlet against him. He himself gives the following account of the way in which he was incited to essay his powers in this kind of writing: "At the memorable epoch of Dr Priestley's emigration to America, I followed, in the city of Philadelphia, the profession of teacher of the English language to Frenchmen. Newspapers were a luxury for which I had little relish, and which, if I had been ever so fond of, I had not time to enjoy. The manifestoes, therefore, of the Doctor, on his landing in that country, and the malicious attacks upon the monarchy and the monarch of England, which certain societies in America thereupon issued through the press, would, had it not been for a circumstance purely accidental, have escaped probably for ever, not only my animadversion, but my knowledge of their existence. One of my scholars, who was a person that we in England should call a coffee-house politician, chose, for once, to read his newspaper by way of lesson; and it happened to be the very paper which contained the addresses presented to Dr Priestley at New York, together with his replies. My scholar, who was a sort of republican, or, at best, but half a monarchist, appeared delighted with the invectives against England, to which he was very much disposed to add. Those Englishmen who have been abroad, particularly if they have had time to make a comparison between the country they are in and that which they left, well know how difficult it is, upon occasions such as I have been

describing, to refrain from expressing their indignation and resentment; and there is not, I trust, much reason to suppose that I should, in this respect, experience less difficulty than another. The dispute was as warm as might reasonably be expected between a Frenchman, uncommonly violent even for a Frenchman, and an Englishman not remarkable for *sang froid;* and the result was a declared resolution on my part to write and publish a pamphlet in defence of my country, which pamphlet he pledged himself to answer. His pledge was forfeited; it is known that mine was not. Thus, sir, it was that I became a writer on politics. 'Happy for you,' you will say, 'if you had continued at your verbs and your nouns!' Perhaps it would, but the fact absorbs reflection; whether it was for my good or otherwise, I entered on the career of political writing; and, without adverting to the circumstances under which others have entered on it, I think it will not be believed that the pen was ever taken up from a motive more pure and laudable." *

To the pamphlet which he produced he gave the title of 'The Tartuffe Detected, or Observations on Priestley's Emigration;' but the first title was afterwards suppressed, because Bradford, the bookseller who undertook to publish it, was afraid that it would provoke some of Priestley's admirers to break his windows. Cobbett remarked severely on the necessity for the suppression, thinking it strange that in a nation where it was announced that all might publish freely, a book-

* Letter to Pitt, 1804; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 450.

seller's windows should be in danger of being broken unless he sold what pleased the mob.

He had considered Priestley, he says in his pamphlet, as a man who had fled from political tumults in England to seek repose in America, as Cowley had proposed to retreat from the stir and bustle of life to the tranquillity of the Summer Islands. But the utterances of the Doctor since his arrival showed that such a notion was utterly unfounded, and that he had come as an incendiary desirous to excite virulent hatred in America towards Great Britain. The Doctor had expressed unqualified admiration of the French Revolution, had become a citizen of France, and a delegate to the *Grande Convention Nationale*, and had sent his son also to Paris to be made a citizen; he had combined with a treasonable party in England to celebrate the 14th of July 1791, the day on which the King of France had taken an oath to maintain the constitution imposed on him by the tyranny of the people; he had beaten his "drum ecclesiastic" to raise recruits in the cause of rebellion, and had delivered seditious discourses called sermons, as attacks on the English constitution; and for all these offences he had been justly punished in seeing his meeting-house, a temple of sedition and infidelity, destroyed; while for the injury done to his dwelling-house, he had been far more than compensated by the award of damages to the amount of above £2000. Yet this leader of Dissenters, the most disloyal, unprincipled, and revolutionary body in Europe, complained that he had received no just protection from the British laws. What more protection,

or what more vengeance could he have expected? Would he have had the whole mob put to death, and the city of Birmingham razed to the ground? He stigmatises the Doctor as an empiric in philosophy, and as a deist at heart. Nor does he omit to bring his knowledge of grammar to bear upon Priestley's style, which he pronounces to be often loose and slovenly, and sometimes ungrammatical.

Of this production, which, though it exhibits less energy than Cobbett afterwards put forth, is written in clear and well-connected language, it does not appear that Priestley himself ever took any notice; but many of his partisans assailed Cobbett on account of it. It went through four or five editions in America, and was reprinted among the 'Selections from Cobbett's Political Works,' published by his sons in England.

The following fable, given in these Observations, is worthy of notice, not only for its political admonition, but for its close resemblance in style, as Sir Henry Bulwer has remarked, to that 'Tale of a Tub' by which he had been so much fascinated:—

"In a pot-shop, well stocked with wares of all sorts, a discontented ill-formed pitcher unluckily bore the sway. One day, after the mortifying neglect of several customers, 'Gentlemen,' said he, addressing himself to his brethren in general—'Gentlemen, with your permission, we are a set of tame fools, without ambition, without courage; condemned to the vilest uses, we suffer all without murmuring. Let us dare to declare ourselves, and we shall soon see the difference. That superb ewer, which, like us, is but earth; those gilded jars, vases, china, and, in short, all those elegant non-

senses, whose colours and beauty have neither weight nor solidity, must yield to our strength and give place to our superior merit.'

"This civic harangue was received with peals of applause, and the pitcher, chosen president, became the organ of the assembly. Some, however, more moderate than the rest, attempted to calm the minds of the multitude; but all those fitted only for vulgar uses were become intractable. Eager to vie with the bowls and cups, they were impatient, almost to madness, to quit their obscure abodes, to shine upon the table, kiss the lip, and ornament the cupboard.

"In vain did a wise water-jug—some say it was a platter—make them a long and serious discourse upon the peacefulness of their vocation. 'Those,' says he, 'who are destined to great employments are rarely the most happy. We are all of the same clay, it is true; but he who made us formed us for different functions. One is for ornament, another for use. The posts the least important are often the most necessary. Our employments are extremely different, and so are our talents.'

"This had a wonderful effect. The most stupid began to open their ears. Perhaps it would have succeeded, if a grease-pot had not cried out with a decisive tone, 'You reason like an ass; to the devil with you and your silly lessons!' Now the scale was turned again. All the horde of pans and pitchers applauded the superior eloquence and reasoning of the grease-pot. In short, they determined on the enterprise. But a dispute arose who should be chief; all would command, and none obey. It was then you

might have heard a clatter; pots, pans, and pitchers, mugs and jugs, all put themselves in motion at once; and so wisely and with so much vigour were their operations conducted that the whole was soon changed, not into china, but into rubbish."

His next attempt was a trifle called 'An Account of the Western Insurrection,' a disturbance in Pennsylvania, occasioned by the imposition of a tax on spirits, but which Cobbett chose to attribute partly to the influence of Genet, an emissary from France, sent to invite the Americans to make common cause with the French Republic, and consequently to go to war with England —and partly, though without reason, to the arrival of Dr Priestley; and this was followed by an equally inconsiderable tract called 'The Dispute with England,' containing a summary view of transactions between America and England from 1783 to 1794—an effusion which it would be superfluous to notice, but for its happy denunciation, such as Cobbett then thought it just to make, of political reformers. "The bulk of *political reformers* is always composed of *needy discontented men,* too indolent or impatient *to advance themselves by fair and honest means,* and too ambitious to remain *quiet in obscurity.* Few of them are men of property, and such as are, owe their possessions to some casual circumstance rather than to *family, industry, or talents.*"

His next pamphlet bore the coarse name of 'A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats,' a production designed to deter the Americans from an alliance with France; detailing, at considerable length, the atrocities committed by the French Convention at the siege and

overthrow of Lyons, and asking the Americans whether they would submit to enter into amicable relations with a nation stained with such bloodshed, notwithstanding that Citizen Bache had declared it would be easy to apologise for all the murders committed in France, and Priestley had said that, as everything works for the good of the Unitarian religion, "we must look upon them as a *blessing*." In his remarks he ridicules a "French civic feast" which had been held at Reading in Massachusetts, where the guests adjourned to a meeting-house to hear a certain Reverend Citizen Prentiss return thanks to Almighty God for the successes of the French atheists; while about the same time some clergy at Boston were praising the Supreme Being "for the successes of *the good sans culottes*." There were at this time two great parties in America, calling themselves Federalists and Antifederalists—the latter, headed by Jefferson, favouring the French, and the former the English, and both engaged in a struggle respecting a "Treaty of Amity and Commerce" with England, which had been some time under discussion by the two Governments, and which was at last accepted by Washington, who, as a discreet ruler, wished for peace, on the 24th of June 1795. During the disputes respecting the treaty, the President was reviled and lampooned as a tyrant by the Antifederalists in their prints; he was even called "a Nero;" and the treaty was violently denounced at numbers of democratic meetings. To persuade the body of the American people of the advantages of the treaty, Cobbett added to his Bone 'A Little Plain English, addressed to the People of the United States,' replying to a pamphlet

of Mr Dallas, secretary of the State of Pennsylvania, and extolling the value of connections with steady John Bull over those with the disorderly French Convention. The publication was but of temporary interest, but Windham thought so highly of it that he said in the House of Commons, in allusion to it, in reply to an attack on Cobbett by Sheridan, "Before I had the pleasure to know him personally, I admired the conduct which he pursued through a most trying crisis in America, where, by his own unaided exertions, he rendered his country services that entitle him to a statue of gold,"* for "he had resolutely opposed all the base principles which had been inculcated these ten years in politics."

The 'Bone to Gnaw' having been reviewed in the 'American Monthly Review' with less approbation than Cobbett thought it deserved, Cobbett retaliated with a tract entitled 'A Kick for a Bite,' much of which is occupied with strictures on the critic's grammar. He also published a 'Second Part of the Bone to Gnaw,' and 'A New-Year's Gift to the Democrats,' both of the same character as his first address to those disturbers of the public peace. His next literary undertaking was to assist in a periodical publication projected by Bradford, called 'The Prospect from the Congress Gallery,' which was to contain reports of the speeches made in Congress, with a few remarks and illustrations. Cobbett was paid for his share in the first number eighteen dollars. Its success was such as to induce Bradford to continue it, and he offered Cobbett, who

* Ann. Register, vol. xlv. (1803), p. 206, 207; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iii. p. 224.

was thinking of breaking off his connection with it, a hundred dollars, instead of eighteen, to superintend the compilation of the next number; an offer which Cobbett says he would have accepted, had it not been for an expression that fell from Bradford's son during their conversation. He remarked that if it were discontinued, their customers would be much disappointed, as his father "had promised a continuation, and had engaged that it should be made interesting." "What!" exclaims Cobbett; "a bookseller undertaking to promise that I would write, and write, too, to please his customers! No; if all his customers, if all the Congress, with the President at their head, had come and solicited me —nay, had my life depended on compliance—I would not have written another line!"

Of the profits which Cobbett made by these publications we have an account from the author himself. The first of them, the Observations, was brought out on the terms which booksellers call "publishing together," the bookseller defraying all expenses, and the profits being equally divided between him and the author. When the copies were all sold off, says Cobbett, "Mr Bradford tendered me an account of the sales. According to this account, my share of the profits—my share only—amounted to the sum of *one shilling and sevenpence halfpenny* currency of the State of Pennsylvania, or about *elevenpence three farthings sterling*, quite entirely clear of any deductions whatsoever." By the words, "my share only," Cobbett appears to indicate that the bookseller's share may have been greater than his. The other pamphlets which he put into Bradford's hands he sold for definite sums:—

For the Bone to Gnaw, he received,	.	125 dollars.
,, Kick for a Bite,	.	20 ,,
,, Bone to Gnaw, Second Part,	.	40 ,,
,, Plain English,	.	100 ,,
,, New-Year's Gift,	.	100 ,,
,, Prospect,	.	18 ,,
In all,	.	403 ,,

Or something more than £80 English money, being about £13 a pamphlet, which may be thought a fair remuneration. But the bookseller had abundance of profit from them; for after they had passed through several editions, and Cobbett, wishing to repurchase them, offered for them as much as he had received for the original copyrights, the offer was refused.

These tracts were published under the name of "Peter Porcupine," a name which he continued to use for some time afterwards. Some few persons, besides his bookseller, knew who it was that had assumed that pseudonym, but to the public he might be said to have been hitherto unknown. But he now resolved to publish his own writings, and took a house, in the summer of 1796, in Second Street, Philadelphia, "for the purpose," he says, "of carrying on the bookselling business," which he looked upon "as being at once a means of getting money, and of propagating writings against the French." Cobbett calls it a large house, and says that he took it on lease. The rent of it was twelve hundred dollars, and he paid a year's rent in advance.*

This may perhaps be a proper place to consider by what means Cobbett could have acquired sufficient

* Letter of Paul Hedgehog, Life of Peter Porcupine, Philadelphia, 1796.

pecuniary means to take such a house, and to stock it with the necessary materials for commencing business. We have seen that when he quitted England for France he was possessed of a hundred and fifty guineas, which Mrs Cobbett had returned to him at Woolwich; and he may have had another hoard of guineas earned in America in the same way as the first. But these supplies must have been pretty well exhausted during his six months' stay in France with his wife, and in his passage to America with her. On arriving in America, he obtained tuition, which yielded him about a hundred and forty dollars a-month—or, as his sons put it, "between four and five hundred pounds a-year; and he had received eighty pounds for his Porcupine pamphlets. He also made some translations from the French for the Bradfords, one of which was Martens's 'Law of Nations,' dedicated to Washington. He had now been four years in America, and, with his frugal way of living, he might have saved a few score pounds, if his income was every year as great as his sons represent it. But it would appear that he could hardly have saved so much as to enable him to enter on a large bookselling business in expensive premises. We shall find, too, that when four years afterwards he brought his business to an end, he was in possession of greater property than this business, considering the deductions which we shall see that it suffered, could have been expected to realise. These computations induce us to surmise that he must have had another source of gain; that the Captain Lane who visited him when the court-martial on his brother officers was coming on, did not visit him empty-handed, but presented him with some

substantial inducement to withdraw from the prosecution. What, indeed, but something of such a nature could have moved him to withdraw from it in so extraordinary, so dishonourable, a manner? If we attribute to him no such motive, we must suppose him to have stultified and disgraced himself from mere caprice; a supposition surely quite incredible. To suppose that he was bribed, indeed, necessitates the supposition that his charges against the officers were not unfounded—in fact, that the officers knew themselves to be guilty; but how is it possible to believe that they were not guilty, or that Cobbett, or any man of such understanding as Cobbett, would have preferred, with such solemnity of asseveration, and such circumstantiality, charges that were utterly unfounded, or would have persisted, without wavering, till within a day or two of the court's assembling, in maintaining and preparing to prove them? As for the show which the officers made of prosecuting him, their desire for legal opinions on his case, and their search for him at Farnham, all this may have been pretence on their part, designed to convey to the regiment, and to the world, assurance of their innocence; or it may have been undertaken at the instance of their friends, who, believing in their guiltlessness, would urge them to convince others of it by punishing their accuser. One fact that shakes our belief in the officers' sincerity is, that Cobbett, when he was afterwards fairly within their reach, was never molested by one of them.

The fact that he was thus left free from molestation, Cobbett made the chief point of his defence when he was attacked in 1809, during his residence at Botley, in a

pamphlet circulated through Hampshire by his political adversaries, containing an account of the court-martial, with the legal opinions for bringing actions against him. "How comes it," he asked, "that I have remained in England now for nine years, and have never been called upon by any of the accused parties to unsay what I said of them in 1792? . . . If the parties had really thought that they had grounds of actions against me, how came they *not to bring those actions* when I returned to England nine years ago, especially as it would have afforded them so charming an opportunity of vindicating their own character, and fixing an everlasting stigma upon that of their accuser, whom they must necessarily hate, and of course wish to expose and punish? How came both they and the Government to remain so quiet? The fact is, they all knew my charges to be true; they were all glad that the matter was got over so quietly; they had not the smallest desire to stir the coals again." This may have been true; but he makes, in the same statement, assertions which are much less credible. The officers may have been guilty; but Cobbett will hardly persuade us of what he here affirms, that his sole object in quitting the army, to which he was strongly attached, was to bring the offenders to justice. Had he not first procured his discharge, he says, even his person would not have been safe. But there can be little doubt that he was tired of the army, in which he could expect no further promotion, and wished to marry and seek some other mode of life.

We may notice that he advances, in this statement, several particulars on his behalf about which he is

elsewhere silent. He says that he had found that the quartermaster, in issuing the men's provisions, kept about a fourth part of them for himself; but it is to be observed that the quartermaster was not one of those whom he had accused. He says that he, and a corporal named Bestland, who was to support him in his charges against the officers, made extracts secretly from the regimental books for their purpose; but that he refused to bring forward these extracts, except on condition that Bestland, to put him out of harm's way, should be allowed his discharge—a condition to which the authorities did not assent; and what became of the extracts he does not inform us. He declares that he wrote to Sir George Yonge on the 24th of January to have the regimental books, from which he had made the extracts, secured, but that he found no order had been given for securing them till the 15th of March, ample time having thus been allowed for garbling them. He asserts that he wrote twenty-seven letters on occasion of the court-martial, among which was an important letter to Pitt, but that his enemies took care to publish only five of them, which were those of least consequence. He states that Captain Lane, who had always been kind to him, told him that the officers, to destroy his credit, had determined to get him prosecuted for sedition, and had brought up several sergeants to swear at the court-martial that they had heard him, at an entertainment which he had given on his departure from the regiment, drink "destruction to the house of Brunswick,"—a charge which, Lane assured him, would probably send him to Botany Bay, as a warning to soldiers who would correct

the military abuses of their superiors. But particulars thus brought forward after the lapse of seventeen years, unsupported by any external testimony, we cannot but regard with some suspicion, and must feel inclined to question how much of them is wholly truth.*

It can be but a fair presumption, then, if not deduction, from all that has been said upon the subject, that the officers, knowing the charges against them not to be unfounded, sent Cobbett an inducement, by the hands of Captain Lane, to withdraw from the prosecution; that Cobbett, having withdrawn, and being aware, when he was discovered at his father's house, that he might be brought into trouble, if not by the accused officers, by the authorities at the Horse Guards, thought proper to take refuge in France; that he carried money with him sufficient to maintain him some months in France, and then to enable him to settle in America; and that the savings from his gains by tuition and authorship in America, added to what he had remaining from his previous store, gave him the means of fitting up and stocking his shop in Philadelphia.

* Fifth Letter to the People of Hampshire, Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iii. p. 249-259.

CHAPTER IV.

Opens his shop in Philadelphia—Commences the 'Political Censor'—Attacks on him by the American press—Commences 'Porcupine's Gazette'—Other publications of his—His meeting with Talleyrand—His boldness provokes hostility—Enmity between him and Benjamin Franklin Bache—Prosecuted by the Spanish Minister for libel—Is arrested, and gives bail—Tried before Judge M'Kean, and acquitted—Characters given by Cobbett of M'Kean and of himself.

THE account of the opening of his shop in Philadelphia, Cobbett may very well be suffered to give in his own words: "The eyes of the democrats and the French, who still lorded it over the city, and who owed me a mutual grudge, were fixed upon me. I thought my situation somewhat perilous. Such truths as I had published, no man had dared to utter in the United States since the Rebellion. I knew that these truths had mortally offended the leading men among the democrats, who could, at any time, muster a mob quite sufficient to destroy my house, and to murder me. I had not a friend to whom I could look with any reasonable hope of receiving efficient support; and as to the law, I had seen too much of republican justice to expect anything but persecution from that quarter. In short, there were in Philadelphia about ten thousand persons, all of whom would have rejoiced to see me murdered; and there might probably be two

thousand who would have been very sorry for it; but not above fifty of whom would have stirred an inch to save me.

"As the time approached for opening my shop, my friends grew more anxious for my safety. It was recommended to me to be cautious how I exposed at my window anything that might provoke the people; and, above all, not to put up any *aristocratical portraits*, which would certainly cause my windows to be demolished.

"I saw the danger, but also saw that I must, at once, set all danger at defiance, or live in everlasting subjection to the prejudices and caprice of a democratical mob. I resolved on the former; and as my shop was to open on a Monday morning, I employed myself all day on Sunday in preparing an exhibition that I thought would put the courage and power of my enemies to the test. I put up in my windows, which were very large, all the portraits that I had in my possession of *kings, queens, princes,* and *nobles.* I had all the English Ministry, several of the bishops and judges, the most famous admirals, and, in short, every picture that I thought likely to excite rage in the enemies of Great Britain.

"Early on the Monday morning I took down my shutters. Such a sight had not been seen in Philadelphia for twenty years. Never, since the beginning of the Rebellion, had any one dared to hoist at his window the portrait of George III.

"In order to make the test as perfect as possible, I had put up some of the *worthies of the Revolution,* and had found out fit companions for them. I had coupled

Franklin and Marat together, and, in another place, M'Kean and Ankerstrom."

It may be supposed that the rage conceived against Cobbett was very strong in the classes of persons whom he specifies; but their fury was kept under restraint. No violence broke out against him. Threats and abuse were uttered only with the pen. An anonymous letter addressed to Olden, his landlord, may have caused him some alarm, for it signified that preparations were being made to destroy the house, unless the offensive prints should be removed; but the threats proved threats only. Attacks on him in print, however, reviling and hammering at him in various ways, continued to be made for a long time.

He had commenced, on the 1st of January 1796, a periodical called 'The Political Censor,' of which he published a number every month. It treats chiefly of American affairs, and of the transactions of America with France; and its contents, except as far as they bear on the life of Cobbett, may now be suffered to remain in obscurity. But in this paper, and in 'Porcupine's Gazette,' another of his periodicals, he had the means of repelling the assaults of his enemies with more force than they were plied. He had offended, in some way, all the booksellers in the city, but especially the Bradfords, father and son, by withdrawing contemptuously from his connection with them. Under the auspices of these persons chiefly, but not without the approbation of many others, came out 'A Pill for Peter Porcupine,' 'Peter Porcupine Detected,' 'A Roaster for Peter Porcupine,' 'A History of Peter Porcupine,' 'A Picture of Peter Porcupine,' 'A Blue

Shop for Peter Porcupine," and other performances of the same kind. All these, except one, seemed to fall innoxious on Cobbett, giving him not the least annoyance. In replying to a series of them, he begins by transcribing a portion of a letter which he says he had written to his father:—

"Dear Father,—When you used to set me off to work in the morning, dressed in my blue smock-frock and woollen spatterdashes, with my bag of bread and cheese, and bottle of small beer swung over my shoulder, on the little crook that my old godfather Boxall gave me, little did you imagine that I should one day become so great a man as to have my picture stuck in the windows, and have four whole books published about me in the course of one week." "Thus," he continues, "begins a letter which I wrote to my father yesterday morning, and which, if it reaches him, will make the old man drink an extraordinary pot of ale to my health. Heaven bless him! I think I see him now, by his old-fashioned fireside, reading the letter to his neighbours. 'Ay, ay,' says he, '*Will* will stand his ground wherever he goes.' And so I will, father, in spite of—democracy."* He then, after telling his adversaries that 'The Political Censor' will be read when their "bungling pamphlets" are forgotten, animadverts upon 'The Pill,' which had cast reflections on Mrs Cobbett, and says that, since the publication of it, he has shown his marriage certificate to the minister of the church opposite his house,—for those who emigrate to the United States had better carry vouchers and certificates with them, or they may, through the

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 132.

boasted liberty of the press, find themselves and their wives and children stigmatised with the vilest of names. But the pamphlet that caused Cobbett real annoyance was 'The Impostor Detected,' an emanation from the virulent resentment of the Bradfords. In their rigmarole pages they called Cobbett's writings "dirty water;" but if such was their opinion, says Cobbett, why did they satiate me with praises of my writings, and try to induce me to continue them? For," he adds, "had I believed the half of what they told me, I should have long ago expired in an ecstasy of self-conceit." They censured him with rather more seriousness, however, in saying that he was in the habit of indirectly puffing his own works, and instancing a letter which he had written to the 'Aurora' newspaper against the second part of the 'Bone to Gnaw,' in order that he himself might defend it in the same paper, and so call greater attention to it. This charge Cobbett did not deny, but said that the letter to the 'Aurora' was written at the suggestion of the Bradfords, and that, even if he had been wholly responsible for it himself, it was quite as justifiable, to compare small things with great, as Pope's pretended preference of Philips's 'Pastorals' to his own in the 'Guardian.' The Bradfords further said that Cobbett lived in a garrett when they first knew him; "and," says Cobbett, "*that lump of walking tallow streaked with lamp-black*, that calls itself Samuel F. Bradford, has the impudence to say that my wardrobe consisted of my old regimentals;" but he retorts that he was at that time the occupier of a very good house, and was earning sufficient by tuition to enable him to dress as well as he

could wish. They alleged, too, that he was in the pay of the British Government; but, he asks, if the Ministry of Great Britain employed me to write, would they not furnish me with such supplies as would relieve me from the necessity of keeping a shop to retail my own works? He concludes his animadversions on the Bradfords, and on all those who had assailed him, by declaring that he *will never write another word in reply to anything published against him.*

In a short time he dropped 'The Political Censor,' and started a daily paper called 'Porcupine's Gazette,' the object of which he thus states:—

"When I undertook to publish a daily paper, it was with the intention of annihilating, if possible, the intriguing, wicked, and indefatigable faction which the French had formed in this country. I was fully aware of the arduousness of the task, and of the inconvenience and danger to which it would expose both me and mine. I was prepared to meet the rancorous vengeance of enemies in the hour of their triumph, and the coolness of friends in the hour of my peril; in short, to acquire riches seemed to me quite uncertain, and to be stripped of every farthing of my property seemed extremely probable; but, let what would happen, I was resolved to pursue the object which I had in contemplation, so long as there remained the most distant probability of success. . . .

"Among the dangers which presented themselves to me," he proceeds, "those to be apprehended from the severity of the law appeared the most formidable, more especially as I happened to be situated in the State of Pennsylvania, where the government, generally speak-

ing, was in the hands of those who had (and sometimes with great indecency) manifested a uniform partiality for the *sans-culotte* French, and a uniform opposition to the Ministers and measures of the Federal Government. These persons I knew I had offended by the promulgation of disagreeable truths; and therefore it was natural that I should seek for some standard as a safe rule for my conduct with respect to *the liberty of my press.*"

From Cobbett's shop also, during the course of his periodical publications, issued, with other tracts, 'The Scarecrow,' a vehicle of defiance and reproach to his opponents, and 'A Letter to the Infamous Thomas Paine,' occasioned by a letter of Paine to Washington, whom Paine now grossly abused, but had previously, in his 'Common Sense' and 'Rights of Man,' egregiously extolled. Cobbett loads Paine with every term and phrase of vilification which his rich treasury of abusive words could supply. Another of his publications of that period was, 'A Life of Peter Porcupine,' which is a professed biography of himself, but which speaks vaguely of much that we should desire to know for certain, and shows that the author, in regard to some portions of his life, was studious rather to conceal than to disclose.

The following passage from 'Porcupine's Gazette,' concerning the man more subtle than other men, I hope to be excused for introducing to the notice of the reader. Talleyrand went over to America at the time that a strong French party there were stirring up the French Government to hostilities against the United States. When he first landed he had just means

enough to set up a shop; but becoming a spy, as it was said, for the French Directory, and being, in consequence, supplied with money from them, he was enabled to set himself in a higher position. "That he *was* a spy," says Cobbett, "is evident from his being afterwards received with open arms by the very men who had proscribed him." This logic is less sound than that by which Cobbett is usually distinguished. However, proceeds Porcupine, "I have a word or two to say about this bishop. First he set up as *a merchant and dealer* at New York, till he had acquired what knowledge he thought was to be come at among persons engaged in mercantile affairs; then he assumed the character of *a gentleman*, at the same time removing to Philadelphia, where he got access to persons of the first rank, and all those who were connected with, and in the confidence of, the Government. Some months after his arrival in this city, he left a message with a friend of his, requesting me to meet him at that friend's house. Several days passed away before the meeting took place; I had no business to call me that way, and therefore I did not go. At last this modern Judas and I got seated by the same fireside. I expected that he wanted to expostulate with me on the severe treatment he had met with at my hands. I had called him an apostate, a hypocrite, and every other name of which he was deserving. I therefore leave the reader to imagine my astonishment when I heard him begin with complimenting me on my *wit* and *learning*. He praised several of my pamphlets, the 'New-Year's Gift' in particular, and still spoke of them as mine. I did not acknowledge myself the author, of

course; but yet he would insist that I was—or, at any rate, they reflected, he said, *infinite honour* on the author, let him be who he might. Having carried this species of flattery as far as he judged it safe, he asked me, with a vast deal of apparent seriousness, whether I had received my education at *Oxford* or at *Cambridge*. Hitherto I had kept my countenance pretty well; but this abominable stretch of hypocrisy, and the placid mien and silver accent with which it was pronounced, would have forced a laugh from a Quaker in the midst of a meeting. I don't recollect what reply I made him; but this I recollect well—I gave him to understand that I was no trout, and consequently was not to be caught by tickling.

"This information led him to something more solid. He began to talk about *business*. . . . I taught English; and, as luck would have it, this was the very commodity that Bishop Perigord wanted. If I had taught Thornton's or Webster's language, or sold sand or ashes or pepper-pot, it would have been just the same to him. He knew the English language as well as I did; but he wanted to have dealings with me in some way or other.

"I knew that, notwithstanding his being proscribed at Paris, he was extremely intimate with Adet; and this circumstance led me to suspect his real business in the United States. I therefore did not care to take him as a scholar. I told him that, being engaged in a translation for the press, I could not possibly quit home. This difficulty the lame friend hopped over in a moment. He would very gladly come to my house. I cannot say but it would have been a great satisfac-

tion to me to have seen the *ci-devant* Bishop of Autun, the guardian of the holy oil that anointed the heads of the descendants of St Louis, come trudging through the dirt to receive a lesson from me; but, on the other hand, I did not want a Frenchman to take a survey either of my desk or my house. My price for teaching was *six* dollars a-month—he offered me *twenty;* but I refused: and before I left him I gave him clearly to understand that I was not to be purchased."

The Thornton mentioned in this extract was an American gentleman who was eager to make a new language for America by turning the letters of the alphabet upside down, and writing the words exactly as they are pronounced.

A person took offence at some passages in 'Porcupine's Gazette,' and wrote a letter, signed 'A Subscriber,' to Mr Fenno, the proprietor of the 'Gazette of the United States,' animadverting on Porcupine's words as "calculated to degrade the American character, and cast odium on the principles of the Revolution." Cobbett replied by saying: "This Subscriber of Mr Fenno's has fallen into the cant of the day. *The press is free;* but you must not lash the baseness or malice of an American for the world, because that *degrades the American character.* You must not censure or ridicule certain political vagaries—such as sovereign people, rights of man, committees of safety, universal suffrage, &c. &c. &c.; all those little freaks must pass uncensured, in whatever part of the world, and under whatever circumstances, they may take place—because they tend *to degrade the principles of the American Revolution.* . . . I well know the opinion that prevails respecting news-

paper printers. I know that it is a general notion that a man of this profession should have no sentiment of his own—that he should be a mere puppet— . . . and that at the awful name of SUBSCRIBER his knees should begin knocking together like those of Nebuchadnezzar. This does not suit me. I have no idea of being a subject of *the sovereign people*, or of *any portion thereof*."

Such sturdy sentiments were ill calculated to propitiate a large portion of the American public. A party were accordingly on the watch for an opportunity to do mischief to the writer. Cobbett, as we have seen, had said that he "would seek for some standard as a safe rule for his conduct with respect to the liberty of his press." It is difficult to conceive how he could suppose he was seeking for any standard as a safe rule, when he was allowing himself, in the opinion of every one else, unlimited freedom in every page of his paper. He attacked, on every occasion of which he could avail himself, Mifflin, the Governor of Pennsylvania, whom he particularly reproached for the difference of his behaviour in welcoming a French frigate and a British ship of war, which entered the Delaware within a few days of each other. On the arrival of the English vessel he was cool and calm; but at the arrival of the French he was, as Cobbett describes him, in such a state of pleasurable excitement that he could be regarded by all who saw him only as "a fellow staring drunk," or "a bedlamite." Roused by such sarcasm, one of the Governor's friends, a person of formidable stature and lowering brows, entered Cobbett's shop one day, and told him to publish nothing more about the

Governor of Pennsylvania. Cobbett made him no reply. He repeated his words, but Cobbett still remained silent. The man then exclaimed, in exasperation, "Mr Cobbett, sir, do you hear me? I tell you that if you publish anything more against the Governor of Pennsylvania there is a *party* ready to tar and feather you! Yes, sir, you'll be tarred and feathered, or perhaps suffer something worse! I have now delivered my message,—so good-bye." "Good-bye," returned Cobbett, bursting into a laugh at his ludicrous vehemence. The visitor brandished a huge stick with which he was armed, but walked off without making any other use of it. Next day, Cobbett, after relating the occurrence in his Gazette, inserted in it the following notice: "This is to inform *the said party* that I will continue to publish whatsoever pieces I please about the Governor of Pennsylvania; that my publication shall be circumscribed by the *law*, and by the law alone; that I despise menaces of every description; and that, let who will be slaves, I am resolved to be free."

One of the objects of Cobbett's contemptuous resentment was Benjamin Franklin Bache, a grandson of Benjamin Franklin, and editor of the 'Aurora,' a paper said to be in the pay of the French, and consequently hostile to the principles maintained by Cobbett. He made attacks on Cobbett from time to time, describing Porcupine's person, and hinting at the propriety of doing him a mischief; but Porcupine for a while made him no reply, as if he were below the Gazette's notice. At last there appeared in the pages of the 'Aurora' an atrociously-insulting attack on Cobbett, under the guise of a communication from a correspondent:—

"In conversation a few days ago, the British Corporal declared that he never would forgive the Americans for their rebellion against their king, and that he never would rest until they were reduced to their former obedience. If the fellow whose back still exhibits the marks of his former virtue should dare to deny this, it can be substantiated by undoubted evidence. After this speech, it may be well to repeat that Peter Porcupine is the champion of the Federalists."

The retort of Cobbett to this slanderous assault was highly effective:—

"Now, pray, sir," he wrote, addressing the editor of the 'Aurora,' "is this of your manufacture, or is it really from a correspondent? If you own it for yours, I assert that you are a liar and an infamous scoundrel; if you do not, your correspondent has my free leave to take those appellations to himself. . . . But why," he then asks, "in the name of all that is rascally and corrupt, cannot you let me alone? I tell you, Mr Bache, you will get nothing by me in a war of words; so you may as well abandon the contest while you can do it with a good grace. I do not wish —and I call on the public to remember what I say— I do not wish to fill my paper with personal satire and abuse; but I will not be insulted with impunity, and particularly by you. I have not forgotten your pointing out the propriety of describing my person, and hinting at the same time the dark purpose of so doing. . . . But it is useless, my dear Bache, to say anything more about the matter. Why should we keep buffeting and sparring at each other? Why should we rend and tear our poor reputations to pieces, merely

for the diversion of the spectators? A great number of persons, rather lovers of fun than of decency, have already pitted us, and are prepared to enjoy the combat. Let us disappoint them. Let us walk about arm in arm. . . . Your pride may indeed reject the society of a British Corporal, as you very justly style me; but, my dear sir, we are now both of the same honest calling. Nobody looks upon you as the grandson of a philosopher or an ambassador. People call you—*they do indeed*—'Ben Bache the newsman,'—nothing more, I assure you; and as they have no regard for your illustrious descent, so you may be sure they will not long remember the meanness of mine."

Cobbett continued to write in this free style, supposing that he might use as strong language in support of the English Government, and in the cause, as he expressed it, of virtue and good order, as others used in defence of sedition and turbulence. But the time was coming when his pen was to receive a check. The first attempt of his enemies, however, to bring the force of the law to bear on him was unsuccessful. This effort was made in August 1797, when Don Carlos Martinez de Yrujo, the Spanish Minister to the United States, applied to the American Government to prosecute Cobbett, as the editor of 'Porcupine's Gazette,' for certain reflections published in that paper on himself and his sovereign, the weak and unfortunate Charles IV.* Cobbett was accordingly summoned to appear in the Federal District Court in the following April; but the Spanish Minister, expressing himself dissatisfied with that arrangement, requested that the cause might

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 86.

be tried before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, of which M'Kean was Chief-Justice. This M'Kean, as was well known, was rancorously hostile to Cobbett, on account of the little respect that had been shown him in the Gazette, and favourable, at the same time, to the Spanish Minister, to whom his daughter was shortly to be married. These were the secret reasons for which Don Carlos de Yrujo desired that the place of the trial should be changed. His request was granted. Of the treatment which Cobbett experienced, on his arrest and on the trial, we have Cobbett's own account as follows :—

"The trifling circumstances attending an arrest and giving bail are scarcely worth relating; but sometimes trifling circumstances serve to convey a more correct idea of the character of the parties concerned in a transaction, and to guide the reader to a more just appreciation of their motives, than the longest and most laboured general account of their conduct.

"The sheriff (whose civility and candour I have every reason to applaud) came to my house *for the first time* at twelve o'clock; and he was ordered to have me before the judge at *half-past one*. Thank God I am not versed in arrests; but, I believe, this is the first time that a man prosecuted for a libel was pinned down to the short space of *an hour and a half* to prepare for going out and to procure himself bail. The English reader (for this pamphlet shall be read in England) will observe that this Government of Pennsylvania is that which is everlastingly boasting of the *mildness* and *humanity* of its laws.

"I was not so destitute of friends as, perhaps, the

judge expected I was. Bail was procured, and we were before him at the appointed time.

"He asked us to sit down. I seated myself on one side of the fire, and he on the other. After he had talked on for some time to very little purpose (at least as to the effect his talk produced on me), he showed me certain newspapers, and asked me if I had printed and published them. To this I replied that *the law did not require me to answer any questions at that stage of the business;* and that, therefore, I should not do it. At this reply, though a very prudent and a very proper one, he waxed exceeding wroth. He instantly ordered me to get off my chair, and stand up before him, though he himself had invited me to sit down; which species of resentment excited in my mind no other sentiment than that which I daresay it has already excited in the mind of the reader."

One of the passages on which the accusation was founded was the following:—

"Ever since Spain has been governed by princes of the Bourbon family, the Spanish name has been disgraced in peace and in war; every important measure has been directed by the crooked politics of France. Their connection, like the obscene harpies of old, contaminates whatever it touches. But never has this been so conspicuous as in the present reign, and more especially at the present period. The degenerate prince that now sways the Spanish sceptre, whom the French have kept on the throne merely as a trophy of their power, or as the butt of their insolence, seems destitute not only of the dignity of a king, but of the common virtues of a man. Not content with allying himself to

the murderers of a benevolent prince, who was the flower of his family, he has become the supple tool of all their most nefarious politics. As the sovereign is at home, so is the minister abroad; the one is governed, like a dependant, by the nod of the five despots at Paris, and the other by the direction of the French agents in America. Because those infidel tyrants had thought proper to rob and insult this country and its Government, and we have thought proper, I am sorry to add, to submit to it, the obsequious imitative Don must attempt the same in order to participate in the guilt, and lessen the infamy, of his masters."

This, with another libel, as it was called, of a similar character, was originally published in Cobbett's Gazette; a third paragraph, which was brought forward on the trial, was extracted from the 'Gazette of the United States.' That he was the author of the two first printed in his own paper Cobbett denied; saying that the writers of them were two gentlemen resident in Philadelphia, natives of America, persons firmly attached to the existing Government. Huish doubts the truth of Cobbett's assertion; and certainly the style and thought in the productions so closely resemble those of Cobbett, as to make it difficult to believe that they were written by any one but himself. The writer of the other, as Cobbett stated three years afterwards, when there was no further danger from the revelation, was an American named Sitgreaves, brother of the Sitgreaves who was one of the commissioners for the settlement of British debts.

The judge, in his charge, summed up the evidence, as was to be expected, strongly against Cobbett, and dwelt

much on the sin of libelling, as being scandalous and detestable, unbecoming a gentleman and a Christian. The jury, however, found a verdict of acquittal, but only by a majority of one: for, their number being nineteen, there were nine in favour of a conviction and ten against it.

Cobbett afterwards wrote the following character of his judge:—

"The grandfather of M'Kean was an Irishman, who *emigrated* by the consent of his Majesty and *twelve good and true men.* He himself was born in America, in Chester county, and was for some time an hostler; then successively a constable, a sheriff, a justice of the peace, and a pettifogger, in which last capacity the revolutionists found him a man fit for their purposes. It was M'Kean who was guilty of the legal murder of the two Quakers, Roberts and Carlisle; and he has been a persecutor of that inoffensive sect from that day to this. He was the principal promoter of all the cruel laws and confiscations in Pennsylvania, and he now lives in a confiscated house. His private character is infamous; he beats his wife, and she beats him. He ordered a wig to be imported for him by Mr Kid, refused to pay for it, and was sued before the Mayor's Court; the dispute was referred to the Court of *nisi prius,* where, merely for the want of the original invoice, which Kid had lost, the judge came off victorious. He is a notorious drunkard. The whole bar, one lawyer excepted, signed a memorial stating that so great a drunkard was he, that, after dinner, person and property were not safe in Pennsylvania. He has been horsewhipped in the city tavern, and kicked in the

street for his insolence to particular persons, and yet this degraded wretch is Chief-Justice of the State."

His own character he depicts in brighter colours, but with no less boldness and vigour:—

"It hardly ever becomes a man to say much of his private character and concerns; but on this occasion I shall be indulged for a moment. I will say, and I will make that saying good, whoever shall oppose it, that I have never attacked any one, whose private character is not, in every light in which it can possibly be viewed, as far beneath mine as infamy is beneath honour. Nay, I defy the city of Philadelphia, populous as it is, and respectable as are many of its inhabitants, to produce me a single man who is more sober, industrious, or honest; who is a kinder husband, a tenderer father, a better master, a firmer friend, or, though last not least, a more zealous and faithful subject.

"Most certainly it is unseemly in any one to say thus much of himself, unless compelled to it by some public outrage on his character; but when the accusation is thus made notorious, so ought the defence. And I do again and again repeat, that I fear not a comparison between my character and that of any man in the city; no, not even with that of the very judge" (Cobbett must have intended this as intense sarcasm) "who held me to be the worst of miscreants. His Honour is welcome, if he please, to carry this comparison into all the actions of our lives, public and domestic, and to extend it beyond ourselves to every branch of our families."

CHAPTER V.

Disappointment of Cobbett's enemies at his acquittal—Personal encounter with Bache—Efforts to procure his expulsion from America—His 'Trial of Republicanism,' and just opinions concerning Parliamentary Reformers and the elective franchise—Opinion of Junius regarding the representation of the people in Parliament—Cobbett's character of Wilkes—Proceedings of M'Kean against Cobbett—Cobbett satirises Rush, a quack doctor—Rush's "Samson of medicine"—Cobbett prosecuted by Rush for libel—Verdict against Cobbett, with damages—Unpopularity of Cobbett in Pennsylvania—Is harshly treated, and determines to return to England.

THE disappointment that Cobbett's enemies had experienced in his acquittal, only exasperated them to devise fresh annoyances for him. They had recourse to every means of molestation. Anonymous threatening letters poured in upon him by scores. One of the writers said, "You infernal ruffian, it is my intention when or wherever I meet you, to give you one of the greatest lambastings ever you got, for writing and speaking in such a disgraceful manner as you do against the greatest and chief heads of our city." Cobbett published the menace, with the remark that he knew the writer to be "a base scoundrel." Paine he abused most unmercifully; but on one occasion, to throw ridicule upon him, he put into the mouth of editor Franklin Bache a doggerel parody on Cato's soliloquy, representing the editor with Paine's 'Age of

Reason' in his hand, sitting at a table on which lay his own Gazette and a halter, and saying,

> "It must be so—Tom Paine, thou reasonest well;"

and

> "Thus am I doubly armed; my death and fame,
> My bane and antidote, are both before me;
> This rope, i' th' twinkling of a broomstick, ends me,
> But my type informs me I shall never die."

This composition did very little credit to Cobbett's abilities as a versifier, but it provoked the grandson of Franklin to add another to the number of threatened horsewhippings announced for the back of Cobbett. One day, as Bache was coming out of the Cross Keys, the great democratic place of assembly, he met Cobbett face to face. "Sir," said he, with a scowl, "your name is William Cobbett." Cobbett admitted the charge. "Then I tell you, William Cobbett," he continued, "that you are a—are a—a very great——yes, William Cobbett, you know me; my name is Bache, and you have thought proper in your villanous paper to hold me up to public ridicule and contempt." "Indeed," rejoined Cobbett, "I always pay every one his due; but if the creature be greatly beneath my notice, I generally give him a thrashing." He was proceeding to say something more, when he was interrupted by Bache, crying, "You are a pest! you are a nuisance! you are a disgrace to the country that gave you a shelter when you could not find one in the country that gave you birth, and which cast you out of it, as it would a poisonous serpent!" This was more than Cobbett could bear, and saying, "You shall find that the serpent can sting," he stretched the editor of the 'Aurora' prostrate

in the kennel, in the sight of a number of bystanders, who had stopped to witness the squabble between "the newspaper men," as they styled them.

Cobbett left him lying in the dirt, but had not been long at home when he received notice of an action for assault from the same attorney that had conducted the prosecution against him for libel. Cobbett prepared for defence on the ground of provocation; but Bache, perhaps from fear of disagreeable exposures, let the matter drop. This is the only occasion, as far as I have discovered, on which Cobbett exercised personal violence against an adversary.

His enemies, however, still persisted in endeavouring to effect his ruin, either by bringing on him heavy legal damages, or procuring his summary expulsion from the country, which would have caused him to part with a large portion of his property at great disadvantage. Some intimation of the thought to which their wish was father, was given in a paragraph in Webster's paper, published some time in March, 1799: "It was reported at Philadelphia, on the Sunday, that the editor of 'Porcupine's Gazette' had been ordered by Government to leave the United States." Cobbett did not suffer this piece of news to pass without comment. He remarked that such a report could not possibly gain belief unless a vast proportion of the people were indeed base, and ready to submit servilely to French influence; that the President could have no thought of banishing him, nor, even if he had such thought, had he the authority to do so, for the Alien Bill empowered him only to send away suspected foreigners—that is, foreigners supposed to be in the interest of the enemy;

and to exercise that power to punish offences against the law, such as libels (even supposing the so-called Porcupine to have been guilty of libelling), would be an unwarrantable and arbitrary abuse of authority, such as the President would never think of committing. He added that he had never published a disrespectful word against the President, and that he had always had the fullest reliance on his justice. He must have been astonished when he was informed, as was really the case, that the President had signified his intention to send him from the country, and that it was only by the advice and remonstrance of the Attorney-General that he was induced to relinquish his design. This discovery convinced him that he must be extremely cautious in his conduct for the future, from consideration both for his person and his property. He accordingly set himself to turn as much of his stock as he could into money.

While he was thus engaged, he published, about the end of the year 1799, a tract called 'The Trial of Republicanism,' in which he set forth all the evils and disadvantages of republican government. There is much good sense in this little treatise, though delivered with somewhat too much effort and swell of phrase. At this time of his life, whenever he spoke of the British constitution, Cobbett stigmatised with the epithets of democrat and revolutionist every one that showed an inclination for Parliamentary Reform, and denounced it as a measure that would bring the country every day nearer to republicanism. The bulk of the people, he justly observed, are by no means fit to choose their law-makers and rulers; for every one who has paid any

attention to the objects of their choice, must have observed that it not unfrequently falls "upon bankrupts, swindlers, quacks, parasites, panders, atheists, apostates—in a word, upon the most infamous and most despicable of the human race; wretches whom no prudent tradesman would trust alone in his shop, and with whom any honest man would blush to be seen in conversation." What can be the cause, it may be asked, of such absurd exercise of choice? Cobbett says he will tell us: "The mass of the people, of all ages, are so fond of nothing as of *power*." But "men of sense know that the people can in reality exercise no power which will not tend to their own injury; and therefore, if they are honest men, as well as men of sense, they scorn to foster their vanity at the expense of their peace and happiness. Hence it is that in States where the popular voice is unchecked by a royal or other hereditary control, that voice is, nine times out of ten, given in favour of those fawning parasites who, in order to gratify their own interest and ambition, profess to acknowledge no sovereignty but that of the people, and who, when they once get into power, rule the poor sovereign that has chosen them with a rod of scorpions, affecting, while the miserable wretch is writhing under their stripes, to call themselves 'his representatives.' . . . An *uncontrolled elective assembly*," he proceeds, "is an undefined, an invisible, and an invulnerable monster; it insinuates like the plague, or strikes like the apoplexy; it is as capricious as cruel, and as ravenous as death; like death, too, it loses half its terrors by the frequent repetition of its ravages; and such is its delusive influence, that every man, though

he daily sees his neighbours falling a sacrifice to the scourge, vainly imagines it to be at a distance from himself." On the extension of the elective franchise he has the following excellent observations: "The ambitious knaves," he says, addressing himself to the people, "who flatter you with high notions of your rights and privileges, who are everlastingly driving in your ears the blessings of what they call *the elective franchise*, wish to add to the number of electors, because they well know that they would thereby gain an accession of strength. The only object such men have in view is the gratification of their own ambition at the public expense, and, to accomplish this object, they stand in need of your assistance. There is a continual struggle between them and the legitimate sovereignty of the country, which restrains them from pillaging, oppressing, and insulting the people. Hence it is that they are continually endeavouring to persuade the people that that sovereignty requires to be checked and controlled, in which nefarious endeavours they are, unfortunately, but too often successful. . . . Stick to the crown, though you find it hanging on a bush, was a precept which a good old Englishman gave to his sons, at a time when the monarchy was threatened with that subversion which it afterwards experienced, and which was attended with the perpetration of a deed that has fixed an indelible stain on the annals of England. Blessed be God!" exclaims Cobbett, "we are threatened with no such danger at present; but a repetition of the precept can never be out of season as long as there are Whigs in existence, and as long as there are men foolish enough to listen to their insidious

harangues." Such were Cobbett's just notions, while his mind was still unbiassed by personal considerations of measures and men that sink nations into democracy. It is worthy of remark that, as to the extension of the franchise, and the granting of members to the manufacturing towns, which at that time (1771) had none, Junius gives an opinion with which Cobbett's is entirely in conformity, and of which many politicians must have undoubtedly acknowledged the justice: "I would not give representatives to those manufacturing towns which have none at present. If the merchant and the manufacturer must be *really* represented, let them become freeholders by their industry, and let the representation of the county be increased."*

We cannot forbear to transcribe his character of the pretended patriot Wilkes:. "When I recollect having heard that, forty years ago, a pair of sleeve-buttons were enhanced to triple their value by the words 'Wilkes and Liberty' being imprinted on the rim; when I recollect that the same paltry device stamped upon the pot gave the fancied taste of stingo to the vapid and muddy dribblings of the barrel; when I recollect that a miserable adventurer, without ancestry, without fortune, without anything but impudence, obscenity, and blasphemy, to recommend him, succeeded, by merely coupling his name with that of liberty, to terrify British justice from her purpose, in shaking the very basis of the throne; when I recollect these things, I cannot help believing that, notwithstanding the proceedings of the Whig Club, we are quite as loyal, and not quite so foolish as our fathers."

* Junius to Wilkes, Bohn's Junius, vol. ii. p. 79.

Belief in the loyalty and wisdom of the nation, taken as a whole, has since received many rude shocks.

Fresh measures continued to be concerted by Cobbett's enemies for his expulsion from Philadelphia. Chief-Justice M'Kean, his unrelenting enemy, as he might well be expected to be, determined to stop, if possible, the publication of 'Porcupine's Gazette,' or to hamper it in such a way as to make it a plague and a loss to its editor. For this purpose he collected a number of Cobbett's papers, and, after a formal inspection of them, issued a warrant to bring the author of them before him, stating, as the ground of the warrant, that he had published false and malicious libels against himself, Jefferson, Dallas, old Franklin, and various other persons, American, English, and French. For these daring publications he summoned him, not to answer the charges against him at the Court, or to give bail for his appearance when called upon, but required him, on his own authority as Chief-Justice, to give surety, himself and two others, in the sum of 4000 dollars, to keep the peace and to be of good behaviour. Into these recognisances Cobbett, it seems, was compelled to enter. M'Kean then applied himself to examine the subsequent publications of Cobbett, in order to find in them what he might call breaches of the recognisances, and issue a process against him. Under a Government where such proceedings were tolerated, as Cobbett observed, where juries might be ignored, where a man might be forced to give security or go to jail for publishing what his accusers would not venture to bring before a court, and where he might be kept bound year after year to keep the peace, which

he had never intended to break, and without ever being brought to trial, every one must perceive that there could be no real liberty of the people.

The person who ultimately became the tool of the Philadelphians in driving Cobbett from America, was one Dr Rush, a practiser in medicine, who pretended to have adopted a sure means for curing the yellow fever. This disease had broken out in Philadelphia in the year 1793, and had re-appeared in 1797, when Mifflin, the Governor, issued a proclamation ordering that every infected person, whose case would admit of removal, should be taken by the friends of the diseased, or by the health-officer, to an appointed situation distant from the city. Under this regulation great hardships were experienced by the poorer class; and the Governor was thus addressed in a letter signed "A Poor Citizen": "Sir, if you were seized with this disease, would you peaceably submit to have a negro forcibly drag you from your house into a common cart, from thence to be conveyed to the place which you term the hospital, but which I and the world term a slaughter-house, there to live in torture for want of proper attendance, and die for a draught of water?" Cobbett, on such grounds, attacked Mifflin's proclamation as an exercise of tyranny. Rush, about the same time, introduced his practice of bleeding almost to death, accompanied with purging by mercury, as methods of subduing and extirpating the malady. The better class of medical men, seeing the danger of his empiricism, thought it right to warn the public against it; and Cobbett printed their warnings in his paper, with a series of remarks, under the title of 'The Rushlight,'

headed with the motto, from the Book of Job, "Can the Rush grow up without mire?" and prolonged through several numbers of the Gazette. For these publications Rush brought an action for libel against Cobbett, part of the libel being an account of the birth and character of Rush, with which Cobbett commenced his observations. He stated that Rush was of English extraction; that his mother kept a huckster's shop; and that his original occupation was that of a blacksmith. He had, however, an extravagant desire to raise himself in the world, to be at the head of something, or to make some discovery that would give him a name. He wrote "Original Essays" on religion, philosophy, and other subjects, and decried the teaching of the learned languages in schools, and the sweetening of tea with West India sugar; but his admonitions made no impression on the American public. At length he resolved to try physic, and an opportunity favourable to his determination presented itself on the spread of the yellow fever in 1793. By proclaiming himself a republican, he obtained patients among those who were of that party in politics. But he was suave and bland to all men, professing universal friendship and humanity, and calling every one who would listen to him his dear friend and fellow-citizen. To all religious sects he was alike affable: Episcopalians and Presbyterians, Quakers and Methodists, received from him equal professions of esteem.

An article appeared one morning in the 'United States Gazette,' signed "A Member of the College of Physicians," giving a very unfavourable account of Rush's conduct during the yellow fever in 1793. This

article was really written by Dr Currie, but was attributed by Rush and his followers to Dr Ross, a Scotch physician of learning and eminence. Rush had sons grown up to manhood, and one of them thought proper to send a challenge to Ross, to which Ross merely replied that the challenger was an impertinent puppy. Rush's son, in a rage, got the help of a Dr Bullus, and the two waylaid Dr Ross and beat him unmercifully with a bludgeon. Next day Cobbett published an account of the matter, which, though incorrect in some minor particulars, was essentially true. Rush's son, however, took offence at the statement, and printed an address to Cobbett, calling him a violator of truth and a coward. Cobbett reprinted the address in the columns of 'Porcupine' as that of not only "an impertinent puppy," as he had been justly called, but "a waylaying coward, a liar, and a rascal." Such were the railings of the American press; but young Rush read Cobbett's vituperation without venturing to treat him as he had treated Ross.

When the yellow fever broke out again in 1797, Rush published certain letters which he had received from a few brothers of the lancet, and some other individuals, giving an account of the wonderful cures wrought by bleeding and the mercurial purge. The mercurial purge he called "the Samson of medicine." But his boastings did not pass unquestioned; many of the more sensible inhabitants of Philadelphia expressed their dread of his practices, and thought it quite fair to employ Cobbett's newspaper in condemning what other newspapers had been employed to extol. Cobbett needed very little persuasion to admit into his columns

exposures of that of which he himself understood the worthlessness. He had an assistant in the junior Fenno, the son of the editor of the 'United States Gazette;' and in a short time Rush was so plied with squibs, epigrams, puns, and quotations, that his proceedings and pretensions, among a large portion of the Philadelphian public, became subjects of continual jests. On his calling his mercurial dose "the Samson of medicine," Cobbett himself remarked that "it was justly compared to Samson, for he believed that he and his partisans had slain more Americans with it than Samson slew of the Philistines; the Israelite having slain his thousands, but the Rushites having slain their tens of thousands."

Rush proceeded against Cobbett for libel. Cobbett, thinking that if the cause were tried at Philadelphia, a jury would probably be packed from among his enemies, and knowing that the law was not fairly administered in Pennsylvania towards British subjects, petitioned the court of that State that the suit might be removed to the next United States' circuit court. His petition rested on a law which had been made by the American Legislature for the better security of the property of aliens, enacting that if a suit were commenced in any State court against an alien, the matter in dispute being more than the sum of five hundred dollars, the defendant might remove the suit, by petition, to the next circuit court of the United States, on giving sufficient bail for his entering such court on the first day of its session. The reply to Cobbett's petition was that it was without precedent, no such request having been made by any British subject since the Revolution.

Cobbett, however, persisted in urging it; but Judge M'Kean, after affecting to listen for an hour to the arguments of Cobbett's lawyers, declared, of his own will, and without assigning any reason for his decision, that the petition of William Cobbett should not be granted.

Some time after this decision, Cobbett, with more boldness than prudence, published in the pages of 'Porcupine' a letter enclosed to him from Washington by a Mr G. Henry Kepple, and signed "G. Blakeney," reflecting severely on the character and former conduct of Judge M'Kean. The person who sent the letter vouched for the respectability of the person that wrote it, and assured Cobbett that the facts *might be relied on.* It commenced thus: "I do hereby certify that Thomas M'Kean, in the year 1776, at the head of a respectable battalion in Amboy, at which time and place I was present, did in a dastardly and cowardly manner relinquish his command, by basely withdrawing himself from said battalion in a private and concealed manner, thereby avoiding what he justly merited for his conduct; and I do also certify that, from his tyrannical, arbitrary, imposing conduct upon the soldiery, not a single man in the battalion either loved, feared, or respected him; they even looked upon him as a base, tyrannical, overbearing coward." It went on to say that what he avoided by his withdrawal was expulsion from the camp to the sound of the "Rogues' March;" that, on occasion of an exchange of prisoners, he used secret influence to procure the release of one M'Kinley, who was taken prisoner in his bed, to the rejection of General Thompson, who was taken fighting

at the head of his men, and that for such underhand dealings he was horsewhipped by General Thompson at a coffee-house in Philadelphia; that General Thompson afterwards offered him satisfaction as a soldier and a gentleman, if he chose to take it, but that, as a coward, he refused; and that he had purchased the certificates of soldiers, when they were starving, and ready to part with them at any price, and afterwards made large profits by them. It does not appear that M'Kean took any public notice of this letter, but he must doubtless have known of its publication, and it would assuredly not diminish his hostility to Cobbett.

The trial was deferred four several times from term to term, from fear, as it seems, of the juries being too favourable to Cobbett. At last it was resolved, on the 13th of December 1799, to bring it on. A list of the jury was submitted to Cobbett, who could only find seven men, among the forty-eight named, that were likely, in his opinion, to give an impartial verdict; and as he could only strike out ten, and Rush struck out those seven, there did not remain a single man on the list in whose honesty he professed to have the least confidence. He, however, engaged three counsel for his defence, Edward Tilghman, William Rawle, and a Mr Harper, the last of whom played the traitor towards him.

In the mean time, M'Kean, notwithstanding all that Cobbett or others had said or written against him, had been exalted from judge into governor; and to Shippen, the senior justice on the bench, who was looking to M'Kean for promotion and emolument, fell the duty of presiding at Cobbett's trial.

The charges against Cobbett were, that he had called Dr Rush *a vain boaster, a quack, a Sangrado*, and had declared that he *slew his patients*. The pleadings of his counsel in defence of Cobbett, and in support of his denunciations of Rush, have sunk into oblivion; but we have an account of the proceedings from Cobbett himself, which tells us all that we need wish to know, and in which he gives a pretended address from himself to the jury, remarking, with prolixity which I shall abridge, on each of the charges in their order. He begins by saying that he thinks it would be difficult, with adherence to the strict letter of the law, to make any such application of his words as would establish the plaintiff's case; but that he scorns to take shelter under any subterfuge, and leaves perversion of the law to his enemies. "I am proud to acknowledge," he continues, "that all the censorious expressions which I am on this occasion accused of having published, were not only published by me, but were pointed at Dr Benjamin Rush; and moreover, that they were not only pointed at Rush, but were so pointed for the express purpose of destroying his practice, so far as that practice corresponded with the well-known and justly-abhorred system of depletion."

He is charged, he observes, with calling Rush a vain boaster. This, he says, is easily shown to be true; for Rush told the College of Physicians that he had, by his system of treatment, rendered the yellow fever as harmless as a common cold; he wrote to Dr Rogers, of New York, that he had cured more than ninety-nine patients out of a hundred; and this was certainly vain boasting —for, at the very time that he thus wrote, it was well

known that four patients out of six died in his own house. This exposure of his empty boastings, continues Cobbett, is surely sufficient to prove him a quack; or, if more proof be necessary, it may be found in his puffing advertisements. As to calling him, being a quack, Sangrado, it did him no injustice; for Sangrado was a quack; and "eminent men are frequently called by the names of other eminent men who have lived in former times or in other nations: thus Tom Paine is called the Wat Tyler of the present age; Franklin is called the Zanga of Boston; and Dr Rush is called the American Sangrado." Is it necessary to show how great a resemblance there is between these two distinguished characters? Let it then be shown; and let us take the description of Dr Rush from the speech of his own counsel, Mr Hopkinson:—

"Dr Sangrado, says Gil Blas, was a man of singular opinions. Dr Rush, says Mr Hopkinson, possesses singularity of opinion in almost everything.

"Dr Sangrado drew blood, *porringer after porringer.* Dr Rush, *pint after pint.*

"Dr Sangrado employed *copious bleedings* to supply the want of perspiration. Dr Rush *did the same.*

"Dr Sangrado says that it is a gross error to think that *blood is necessary to the preservation of life.* Dr Rush calls it *the triumph of reason to prescribe bleeding almost to death.*

"Dr Sangrado sends a footboy, a lackey, to bleed and drench the citizens of Valladolid. Dr Rush qualifies negroes and old women to bleed and purge those of Philadelphia.

"Dr Sangrado wrote a book, and so did Dr Rush, in

which both of them *declared their resolution to stick to their principles and practice to the last extremity.*

"Dr Sangrado is called by his contemporaries the Hippocrates of Spain. Dr Rush's contemporaries call him the Hippocrates of Pennsylvania. The only shade of difference is in their practice; the American employs doses of mercury and jalap, while the Spaniard contents himself with draughts of warm water."

The fourth point of accusation, the expression used by Cobbett that Rush *had slain his patients*, as Samson slew the Philistines, had been curiously tortured by Cobbett's enemies into an assertion that Rush "was in the habit of killing people *with deadly weapons.*" But, said Cobbett, it is not thus that a man's words are to be treated; no other construction is to be put upon them but that which they will fairly bear in connection with the other words with which they are used.

Three witnesses were examined, pupils of Dr Rush, to prove that Cobbett, in satirising Rush, was actuated by private malice—not, as he professed, by regard for the public good. One of them deposed that he heard Cobbett say, speaking of Rush, "D—— him, he had better withdraw his suit, or I will persecute him while living, and his memory after his death." Cobbett, after a few words respecting the occasion to which the witness alluded, says he well remembers expressing his resentment of Rush's vexatious appeal to the law, and threatening to make him repent of it; "but as to d——ing him," he proceeds, "I utterly deny it; for though I have to atone for too many sins of that sort, I am certain that I never so far degraded a curse as to bestow it on Rush: and with respect to

my saying that I would persecute his memory after his death, the thing is absolutely incredible; I might as reasonably have threatened to persecute the memory of a butterfly or a maggot. *Can the rush,* says Job, *grow up without mire? While it is yet in its greenness,* and not cut down, *it withereth before any other herb.* Upon reading these words, one is tempted to believe that the holy seer had the Pennsylvanian Hippocrates in his eye; for although he is yet in his greenness, though he is still alive, his fame has perished of itself; it is withered and dead."

Judge Shippen delivered a charge to the jury, in which he pretty plainly intimated that what Cobbett had published about Rush indicated malice, and that he had perverted the liberty of the press to the purposes of private slander; and he observed that, in regard to the assessment of damages, the jury were the almost uncontrollable judges; that if they were excessive, the Court indeed had the power to order a new trial, but that the law did not consider damages excessive, unless they were "so outrageously disproportionate to the offence as at the first blush to shock every person who hears of them."

The trial concluded on the 14th of December, when the jury gave a verdict against Cobbett, with 5000 dollars damages. It was usual to allow four days, before entering up the judgment, to give the defendant time for moving in arrest, if he thought proper to do so. On the 17th, therefore, Tilghman moved for a rule to show cause why the verdict should not be set aside for excess of damages; but Shippen and the Court rejected the motion; and so eager was Rush to seize on

the proceeds of the conviction which he had obtained, that he sent off expresses, a few hours after the trial was ended, to execute the judgment at New York, where Cobbett then was; and Cobbett was actually arrested there for the 5000 dollars on the 16th, the day before a new trial was refused; so that the plaintiff and his party, as Cobbett observed, must have felt quite sure, from the moment when the verdict was given, that a new trial would not be granted. Cobbett, however, was prepared with bail, and was set at liberty.

Cobbett's removal from Philadelphia to New York was the consequence of a declaration which he had publicly made that if M'Kean should be elected Governor of Pennsylvania, he would immediately remove out of the State. To this declaration he thought himself bound to adhere; and he had accordingly sent off portions of his books and furniture to New York, where he had determined to fix his residence, though he was in Philadelphia several days during the preparations for his defence on the trial.

He wrote a reply of some length to Shippen's charge, inquiring whether it deserved to be stigmatised more for stupidity or for malice; but his remarks made very little impression on the body of the Pennsylvanians. Indeed, Cobbett had at length succeeded in rendering himself thoroughly unpopular with the majority of the American people. His incessant abuse of several of the leading men who had been instrumental in establishing the independence of the American Colonies, was extremely offensive to the multitude. To say nothing of his attacks on Paine, his sarcasms on Franklin and Priestley were so gross and extravagant, as to offend

every one that had the least respect for those philosophers. His praises of King George were disgusting, to a people among whom royalty was scorned and hooted. So that it is not at all wonderful that a large party should have shown great exultation when the verdict was given against him. The result of the trial was hailed with loud acclamations both from the crowd within the Court and the crowd without, who were waiting to hear the sentence. Scarcely a voice was raised in favour of Cobbett, except those of his counsel, who were heard with impatience. The Court took little trouble to repress the clamour against him; and the newspaper editors, on the following day, reported the tumultuous proceedings as proofs of the zeal and justice of their fellow-citizens.

Though Cobbett had given bail for payment of the fine, his enemies in Philadelphia contrived to fix on the effects which he had left in his house there on his removal, and had advertised for sale. They lodged an attachment with his agent, and with his clerk whom he had left to collect debts; and they ultimately sold, it can hardly be thought legally, the property found in his house for four hundred dollars, though it ought to have brought, according to Cobbett's estimation, nine hundred or a thousand. The only cause, however, which he had for regretting the seizure and attachments, was, he says, "the delay occasioned in the discharge of some few demands against him in Philadelphia. I owed," he proceeds, "about eight hundred dollars when I came away, while the debts which I left to be collected amounted to two thousand five hundred. By attaching this money, which my clerk

should collect, the payment of the eight hundred dollars has been delayed, but my creditors require no assurance of the ultimate liquidation of their debts; they all know that I am no PENNSYLVANIAN." He calculated that, with the costs of the suit, the loss incurred by the interruption in collecting his debts, and the low prices at which his goods were sold at the sheriff's auction, he was mulcted, by Rush's proceedings, in little less than eight thousand dollars, or about sixteen hundred pounds sterling. The knowledge that Cobbett suffered such a loss, and yet retained sufficient means to bring him back to England, and settle him in business there, causes us fresh perplexity in regard to the methods by which he obtained so much property. We found it impossible to satisfy ourselves, as has been seen, as to the way in which he got money to start himself in business. He had been in America at that time not quite four years; part of that period he had been engaged in teaching, from which he could hardly have gained sufficient to enter on so large a shop as he took; his 'Porcupine's Gazette,' as he stated in the concluding number of it, had "never yielded him a farthing of clear profit;" and if it had not been for "the other branches of his business," he would not have been able "to support the loss occasioned by the publication of his paper." But it is vain to attempt to clear the subject of its mystery.

In a letter to an American residing in London, written soon after his return to England, in reply to some expostulations from him regarding his reflections on the Americans, he tells him: "I hope I have more and better friends in America than any man in the

world has;" for "in less than a month after the monstrous sum of five thousand dollars was so unjustly assessed, your countrymen would have paid it every farthing; and I certainly should have accepted it at their hands *had the payment not been already voluntarily provided for by British gentlemen in Canada and the United States.*" But whether he means that these British and Canadian gentlemen actually paid the fine for him, or whether he merely alludes to those who, as has been said above, became bail for its payment, is not clear. "When he removed to New York," says his sons, "he there entered into business again as a bookseller; but on finding the result of this trial, and that a suit was entered against him by the State of Pennsylvania for forfeited recognisances, he yielded to the invitations of his English correspondents, and came home."* This renders the matter still more obscure; Cobbett speaks of himself as having had ample means to pay; yet his sons say that his recognisances were forfeited.

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 174.

CHAPTER VI.

Cobbett's farewell to the Americans—Arrival in England—Notice which his American writings had attracted in England—Windham finds him out, and recommends him to Pitt—Whether he dined at Windham's with Pitt—Refuses a share in a Government newspaper—Starts the 'Porcupine'—Its Tory politics—Cobbett's just remarks on Catholic emancipation, and concessions to Roman Catholics—Wilkes's notions of the character of Papists—Reprint of Porcupine's Works—Letters to Lord Hawkesbury and Mr Addington on the peace of Amiens—Cobbett refuses to illuminate his house at the rejoicings—His windows broken.

He set sail from New York on the 1st of June 1800. At the time of his departure he published in the Philadelphian papers a farewell address to the Americans, from which the following is an extract:—

"When people care not two straws for each other, ceremony at parting is mere grimace; and as I have long felt the most perfect indifference with regard to a vast majority of those whom I now address, I shall spare myself the trouble of a ceremonious farewell. Let me, however, not depart from you with indiscriminating contempt. If no man ever had so many and such malignant foes, no one ever had more friends, and those more kind, more sincere, and more faithful. If I have been unjustly vilified by some, others have extolled me far beyond my merits; if the savages of the city have scared my children in their cradle,

those children have for their father's sake been soothed and caressed by the affectionate, the gentle, the generous inhabitants of the country, under whose hospitable roofs I have spent some of the happiest hours of my life."

Cobbett's sons, as we have observed, say that when their father returned to England he was influenced by invitations from English correspondents. They farther say that among these correspondents were some of the ablest writers and partisans of the English Government, whose notice "Porcupine's" forcible publications had attracted. Certain agents of the English Government in America, too, had fixed their attention on him, but had considered him too independent and self-willed for them to enter into negotiations with him. He happened to be in some shop in America, unknown or unnoticed, when the English consul came in, and spoke of him to some other person there as "a wild fellow." Such he appeared when he came home, and when, having felt the power of his pen in America, he was disposed to do something with it in England. On his arrival, consulting again the statement of his sons, we find that "he was immediately sought for by the late Mr Windham, was by him introduced to Mr Pitt at a dinner-party; invited to Mr Windham's house, was offered a share in the 'True Briton' newspaper, with printing-machines and type ready furnished;" but this offer he refused. About the dinner here mentioned, and the introduction, real or intended, of Cobbett to Pitt, much has been said and written; and it seems to have been almost universally believed that no such introduction took place. The story current in the newspapers at

the time of Cobbett's death was, that Pitt refused Windham's invitation to dinner, being too haughty and aristocratic to meet the ex-sergeant.* Cobbett himself, in three passages of his works, speaks of the introduction to Pitt at Windham's as having actually taken place. In one passage, telling of his revisiting his native place, after his return from America, he says: "When I came to reflect, what a change! what scenes I had gone through! how altered my state! I had dined the day before at the Secretary of State's, in company with Mr Pitt, and had been waited upon by men in gaudy liveries! I had had nobody to assist me in the world. No teachers of any sort. Nobody to shelter me from the consequences of bad, and no one to counsel me to good, behaviour. I felt proud. The distinctions of rank, birth, and wealth, all became nothing in my eyes; and from that moment (less than a month after my arrival in England) I resolved never to bend before them."† In another passage he gives still more particulars. When some persons in Hampshire, in 1809, circulated reports to his disparagement respecting the court-martial at which he failed to appear as prosecutor, he thought fit, as a reply to them, to publish, in his Register for June 17 of that year, "An Address to the People of Hampshire," in which he speaks thus on the subject: "Mr Windham and Mr Yorke have been since my return, and the former was before, Secretaries at War; they had the whole history in their

* See Fraser's Magazine for August, 1835; Huish's Life of Cobbett, vol. i. p. 296; Anonymous Life of Cobbett, 12mo, 1835, p. 153; Notes and Queries, third series, vol. v. p. 422; Cobbett's Penny Trash (a satire on Cobbett), No. III., March 1831, p. 11.

† Year's Residence in America, date of January 15.

office; and yet nobody in the country has ever *spoken*, and, I believe, *thought*, better of me than Mr Windham and Mr Yorke have. I remember that in dining with Mr Pitt, at Mr Windham's, in August 1800, the former asked me about *Lord Edward Fitzgerald*. We talked about him a good deal. I gave the company present (of which Mr Canning was one) an account of his conduct while at the regiment; I spoke in very high terms of his zeal for the service, and I told Mr Pitt that Lord Edward was the only sober and the only *honest* officer I had ever known in the army. I did this for the express purpose of leading him on to talk about the court-martial; but it was avoided. In fact they all well knew that what I had complained of was true, and that I had been baffled in my attempts to obtain justice, only because I had neither money nor friends. The same is known to those who now are publishing and circulating this false account of that transaction; but what they have in view is not truth."* In a letter to Mr Rose, too, entitled "A New-Year's Gift to Old George Rose," written in 1817, he says: "Very soon after my arrival [from America], I was invited to dine at Mr Windham's, who was then Secretary at War, and did dine in company of Pitt, who was very polite to me, and whose manners I very much admired. At this dinner, besides the brave and honest (though misguided) host, were Mr Canning, Mr Frere, Mr George Ellis, and some others whom I do not now recollect. I was never presumptuous in my life, and I

* Fifth Letter to the People of Hampshire, Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iii. p. 262; see also Second Letter, p. 224.

regarded this as a great act of condescension on the part of Mr Windham, and more especially on the part of Mr Pitt, of whose talents and integrity I had then the highest possible opinion. . . . What reception could be more flattering to a man who had been a private soldier but a few years before, and who, even then, had not more than six or seven hundred pounds in the world? I was well aware that Mr Pitt never admitted newspaper-writers to such honour."* Besides writing thus, his sons say that he used to allude in conversation to his meeting with Mr Pitt at the dinner-party, and to say that he suggested to Mr Pitt the propriety of doing something for an officer who had rescued some important despatches from the sea. The despatches were from the French Minister at Philadelphia, and were sent off to France by a French ship, which, as we were then at war with France, chanced to be captured by an English ship in the Channel, when the captain of the French ship threw the despatches overboard; but the English captain observing the packet fall, leaped into the sea and brought it up entire. The papers were sent to the English Government, and found to contain traitorous communications from Randolph, the American Secretary of State, to the French Minister; and the English Government sent them to the President of the United States. Pitt, when Cobbett spoke on the subject, turned to Windham, and inquired whether the man had not received some reward.† Cobbett's sons are

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 80.

† Ibid., vol. i. p. 213, 214, 233; and Preface, p. viii.

surely justified in considering these as sufficient testimonies that Pitt was not too haughty to meet their father at Windham's table. Yet it is the duty of the biographer to remark that there is no attestation to the fact of the meeting but Cobbett's own. And if Windham expected that Pitt would take notice of Cobbett, and solicit his support as a writer, he was evidently disappointed.

He also relates that he dined with Canning, at Canning's house at Putney, and that Canning paid him many compliments for his exertions in the cause of England.* He states, too, that he dined with Mr Hammond, then Under-Secretary of State for the Foreign Department, in company with Sir William Scott and Lord Hawkesbury, afterwards Lord Liverpool. According to Cobbett's own account, it was this Mr Hammond who offered him, with the knowledge of the Government, the share in the newspaper. Two papers, the 'Sun,' and the 'True Briton,' had been set on foot by the Treasury, and Cobbett was told that he might have the proprietorship of one of them, with the presses and type, worth a considerable sum of money. But Cobbett gave him, though not without great reluctance (being sensible, as he says, of the value of the tender), the following answer: "I am very much obliged to you, and to the gentlemen of whom you speak, for this offer; but, though I am very poor, my greatest desire is to render the greatest possible service to my country; and I am convinced that by keeping myself wholly free, and relying upon my own means, I shall be able to give the Government much more efficient

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iii. p. 224.

support than if any species of dependence could be traced to me;" adding that he did not wish to throw blame on those who were thus dependent, and that he should be thankful for any information that they might be pleased to give him for his own use. Mr Hammond replied, as Cobbett tells, "Well, I must say that I think you take the honourable course, and I sincerely wish it may also be the profitable one."*

Having thus refused the offer of a share in the 'True Briton,' he started a weekly newspaper called the 'Porcupine.' He started it, he tells us, at the solicitation of Mr Windham and Dr Laurence, who engaged to enable him to set it on foot, "for I had not myself," he says, "the means." They assisted him on the express and written condition that he should not be under the control or influence of any person or party.† In the prospectus of this paper he inveighs strongly against the revolutionary proceedings of France, and the democratical institutions of America, "and expresses his surprise that, notwithstanding the example of the one, and the more dreadful example of the other, there should be found demagogues in England bawling for what they call *reform*, and undermining the foundation of the throne and the Church." For royal hereditary government he professes unbounded admiration, and congratulates himself on being again in that country whose sovereign "*watched over him in his infancy.*" As to the Church, it may astonish some readers, who have had no high notions of his orthodoxy, to find him expressing himself thus: "Convinced as I

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 80, 81.

† Ibid., p. 82.

am from the experience of America, and from history in general, that an established Church is absolutely necessary to the existence of religion and morality—convinced, also, that the Church of England, while she is *an ornament, an honour*, and *a blessing* to the nation, is the principal pillar of the throne—I trust I shall never be base enough to decline a combat with her enemies, whether they approach me *in the lank locks of the sectary*, or the *scald crop of the Jacobin*."

Cobbett thus began his political career in England as a decided partisan of the Tories. He expressed hatred and contempt of France and all that was French, and gave his support to Mr Pitt in the hope of seeing France crushed in the war which Pitt and the ruling party were then promoting.

He gave notice that his paper should be kept pure from the foul and offensive advertisements of quacks, though he was told, he said, that he should lose five hundred a-year by the exclusion, as well as incur the hostility of the vendors of death-dealing nostrums. In this resolution he may have been influenced by his recollection of what he had suffered from the quack Rush.

The 'Porcupine' will not require much notice, for it was not long before Cobbett took a dislike to it, and discontinued it. We may, however, fix our attention on two or three matters that appear in its pages, illustrating still farther the politics of its proprietor at the time. When he commenced the paper, the price of provisions was extremely high, and the country seemed on the verge of famine. Most of the public prints attributed this state of things to the war; but Cobbett

took another view of the matter, and argued that the war was no cause of scarcity. He maintained that the war, through the constant drains which it made upon the population, produced a contrary effect; for the country was thus exhausted of its young males, who would probably have married and increased the number of consumers of provisions. The conviction which he professed was, that the scarcity was owing to the state of the circulating medium, which was so much debased as to be almost valueless in foreign countries for the purposes of commerce. Yet he was in the wrong, as well as all others who imputed to one cause that which was the effect of many. But whatever had produced that condition of things, the populace became discontented, and laid the blame of their sufferings, as is usual with them in such cases, on the Government. Mr Alderman Waithman, a somewhat factious opponent of the measures of the Ministry and the influence of the Crown, stirred up the Common Council to take into their consideration the condition of the country, and to petition the King to assemble Parliament, in order to devise measures for the redress of grievances, and for preventing the commission of violent excesses. To this the King, as if he thought the request presumptuous, returned a very curt reply, saying that he was always desirous of consulting his Parliament in any public emergency, and that he had already given directions for assembling it. When this answer was received, Waithman moved a resolution to the effect that those who had advised it had shown disrespect to the Court of Common Council, and disregard of the people's distresses. This proposition was negatived, and Cob-

bett, in the pages of the 'Porcupine,' expresses his extreme delight at its rejection, and his abhorrence of anything approaching to dictation to the monarch. "Though," he says, "*we* (that is, I the editor) have not the honour of being Liverymen of the city of London, we have the much greater honour of being Englishmen. Though we would be the last to restrain the liberties of the city, we shall certainly be the very first to resist its encroachment on *our* liberties; and every attempt to assume a dictatorship in the affairs of the nation we shall look upon as such an encroachment. In other countries we have seen the fatal effects of the all-devouring influence of great cities where a handful of ambitious and worthless demagogues have frequently succeeded in usurping, little by little, all the powers of government."

When the Livery elected Coombe Lord Mayor, Cobbett, taking occasion from a paragraph in an American newspaper on the election, wrote them an ironical letter of commendation, congratulating them on having gained themselves "the applauses of all the republicans, revolutionists, rebels, and regicides in America." The coarseness of his language, on this and other subjects, called forth remonstrances from some of his readers. He had boasted that the 'Porcupine,' if not seen in pothouses, was read by persons of property, rank, and respectability, as well as in the best private families; and he was admonished that, if he wished to secure the approbation of such readers, he must remember that he was writing for an English public, and not for the illiterate mob of America, who could scarcely distinguish junkets from garbage. But it was not, as

Cobbett professed to believe, the coarseness of the style of the paper that caused its failure; it was, he said, the independent spirit of its proprietor, who would not take money for the insertion of paragraphs, or throw out hints against a person's character that the person might purchase his silence. It was by such dirty means, he declared, that the daily press, for the most part, was supported, and that the owners of certain papers were enabled to ride in chariots.*

Having discontinued the 'Porcupine,' he opened, early in 1801, a bookseller's shop in Pall Mall, in partnership with John Morgan, an Englishman whom he had known in Philadelphia. The shop bore the sign of the Crown, Bible, and Mitre, indicative of the principles which the partners would maintain. "In this shop," say his sons,† "he might have made what fortune he pleased, for never was a man more favourably circumstanced. He had the choicest connection that a tradesman could wish for, and as much of it as would have sated the appetite of the most thrifty man." But to attend to business with sufficient diligence to render it thoroughly successful, and to write long political articles or letters, were occupations scarcely to be pursued together. Cobbett was too much inclined to discuss public matters, and had too much indulged his inclination, to be able to withdraw his thoughts long from them. In February 1801 Pitt resigned his post of Prime Minister, on the refusal of the King to consent to what was called Catholic emancipation. Cobbett immediately addressed several letters to the public

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 81.

† Ibid., vol. i.; Preface, p. xiii.

animadverting on Pitt's measure, giving ample reasons for his difference in opinion from a Minister whose talents he had long admired, and "whose character and conduct," he said, alluding to his fortunes in America, "he had voluntarily defended at the expense of his peace and property, and not unfrequently at the hazard of his life." He argued, very ably, that the Catholics would never cease to desire concessions until there was nothing left for them to ask; and that those who maintain the King to be a heretic, doomed, unless he be converted, to everlasting flames, could not be safely or decently admitted as legislators or ministers. As nothing will content the Catholics, short of the universal predominance of their creed, there is no way of keeping them harmless but that of excluding them from power. "Destitute of power," he says, "they may load you with their maledictions, and now and then pester you with their vulgar clamours, their pot-house conspiracies and mobbish revolts; but, *once open the Legislature to them*, once place them on the bench of justice, once let them into the Cabinet, and make their bosoms, or rather the bosoms of their confessors, the repository of the secrets of State, and if they do not work their disgrace and destruction, you will have better fortune than your prudence deserves." * The prediction that no concessions would satisfy the Catholics we are doomed to see daily in the course of fulfilment. John Wilkes, who was no bigot to any form of religion, and so far an impartial judge, well understood the difference which policy required to be made between Roman Catholics and other dissenters from the

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. i. p. 350, 352.

Established Church. Speaking of King William's desire to grant complete toleration to Protestant dissenters of every denomination, but to exclude Roman Catholics from that privilege, he says: "It must be allowed that the Roman Catholics are, in some important particulars, to be considered in a different light from all other dissenters; not only because their religion is intolerant, bloody, and idolatrous, but from *their claims with respect to the controlling, in many points, the civil power of the magistrate.*"*

In these letters he shows much more knowledge of theological controversy than he could well have been expected to possess. But he might have been assisted to some of his learning by others. He sets forth, with much accuracy, the different opinions that have been held respecting the great question of the connection between Church and State. He observes, that while the Catholics make the civil subject to the spiritual authority, the Puritans declare that the Church and the Commonwealth are naturally, and ought to be, totally and perpetually separate. He touches on the judgment of Hooker, which allowed ecclesiastical rights to civil princes; on the laxity of Hoadly, which would deprive the Church of secular support; and on the strictness of Sherlock, which would make it the first duty of the magistrate to maintain it. He also gives a lucid summary of the doctrine of Warburton's 'Alliance between Church and State;' and concludes by affirming that, however the connection of the two be maintained, but especially if the Church be under the

* Introduction to the History of England; Almon's Correspondence and Memoir of Wilkes, vol. v. p. 191.

control of the State, such connection must promote the mutual benefit and prosperity of both. But "if," he adds, "you give the proposed encouragement to the enemies of the Reformation, if you throw open the Protestant establishment to the recurrence of the ancient Popery, you at once let the Church loose from its subjection, by authorising the subject to look to a paramount head of the Church elsewhere."

From this shop proceeded a reprint of his 'Life of Tom Paine,' and a collection of the 'Works of Peter Porcupine,' in twelve octavo volumes. The latter was published by subscription. It is inscribed to John Reeves, Esq., "Founder of the Loyal Association against Republicans and Levellers," in a dedication dated May 29, 1801, commencing thus: "This, the anniversary of that happy day which drove rebellion, republicanism, and tyranny from England, which restored the King to the throne, the prelates to the Church, the nobles to their titles, the people to their liberties, and which brought the regicides to the gibbet —this auspicious day I have chosen for dedicating to you my humble labours in that cause of which you have long been the most distinguished and most successful champion." In the preface republicanism is strongly condemned; Washington is stigmatised as a rebel; and the American Revolution is termed a rebellion against the most just of sovereigns. Among the subscribers, amounting in all to about six hundred, were the Prince of Wales, the Dukes of York, Clarence, Kent, and Cumberland, the Right Honourable Henry Addington, George Rose, Nicholas Vansittart, and many others of the nobility and leading characters

of the time. Cobbett's patrons probably expected something different in character from the bundles of stuff that were laid before them; volumes consisting of little else but dissertations on American affairs, and attacks on persons in America with whom he had rushed into disputes. Cobbett admits that he feels a diffidence in offering such writings to the English public, yet hopes that the subjects of which they treat may give them something of interest. He allows that it will "require a considerable stock of patience" to go through the volumes, but asserts that, if any one should have such patience, he will not only be guarded "against the yawning and infernal gulf of democracy," but will gain "more information respecting the *manners, customs, morals, religion,* and *politics* of America, than from all the histories and travels that have ever yet been published." * I have inspected the volumes, and agree in opinion of them with Mr Huish, who read them through, and who says that on all the subjects, with the exception of politics, on which Cobbett professes to give such ample information, the reader may rise from the perusal very little the wiser. †

From the same shop, about the same time, issued a series of letters addressed to Lord Hawkesbury, afterwards Earl of Liverpool, and three others addressed to Mr Addington, afterwards Lord Sidmouth, on the peace of Amiens—that peace of which somebody, whose words Sheridan borrowed to repeat in the House of Commons, said "many might be glad but none could be proud." In these epistles Cobbett dwells on the losses which England would suffer, in territory and in

* Preface. † Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. i. p. 362, 365.

commerce, by the terms made with France. We need not now dwell on the contents of these letters, which are matter of the past. They were read by Müller, the German historian, who was so delighted with their clearness and force of style, that he pronounced them to be the best compositions of the kind since the days of Demosthenes and Cicero. "Have you read," he asks, in a letter to his brother, "William Cobbett's 'Letters to Hawkesbury and Addington,' the most eloquent writing since the time of the two great professors of Philippic oratory? How apprehensively he demonstrates what is, and what is coming!"*

The English mob were so delighted with the peace, which they expected would immediately cheapen bread, and which was incessantly extolled by the Ministerial press, that they took the horses out of the carriage containing the two Frenchmen, Otto and Lauriston, who had been sent over to England to sign the preliminaries, and dragged it from Oxford Street to Downing Street, and then through the park along Pall Mall. Such honour done to French citizens, who had come over to sign a bad peace, was an atrocity in the eyes of Cobbett. A general illumination was to follow; Cobbett resolved to take no part in it. The public offices had encouraged it, and "a vile degraded rabble, miscalled Britons," as he says, were to enforce it. As soon as he found the illumination was to be compulsory, he resolved not to submit to the disgrace of lighting candles on such an occasion. His wife had been confined the evening before, but he was still determined.

* Works of Johannes Von Müller, part iii. p. 14; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 212.

He wrote to Lord Pelham, the Secretary of State, informing him of his wife's condition and his own resolution; and his lordship, whose condescension Cobbett gratefully acknowledged, gave Sir Richard Ford, the Bow Street magistrate, directions to protect Cobbett's premises. Mrs Cobbett, rather than allow her husband to yield to the mob, desired to be removed to the house of a friend. She had not been gone long, when, about half-past nine, a large mob assembled before his house and demanded that it should be lighted up. He answered them with scorn and defiance. Mr Graham, another of the Bow Street magistrates, was in attendance with his officers, but exerted themselves in vain to prevent violence. It chanced that the next house was under repair, and a large number of bricks were piled in front of it—an ample store of ammunition for the rabble. This they used, as Cobbett tells us, "with more or less fury, for about an hour and a half, during which time a party of Horse Guards were called in to the aid of the civil power. Great part of the windows were broken; the sash-frames of the ground-floor almost entirely demolished; the panels of the window-shutters were dashed in; the window-frames broken in several places; the door nearly forced open; and much other damage done to several parts of the house." He was astonished that the mob assumed so much of English liberty, and allowed him so little. But he refused the warlike offers of the men in his employ, who would have repelled force by force, and resolved to be content with such protection or redress as the law afforded him. Six of the ringleaders of the mob, or, as he himself calls them, "six of the villains," were apprehended,

three of whom were clerks in Government offices. One of them was Charles Beloe, son of the Rev. William Beloe, who was collared by Mr Windham with a brick-bat in his hand; and another, John Harwood, an amanuensis to Beloe the father. These two, with another named Wagstaff, were convicted of rioting at the quarter sessions, and sentenced to fines—Beloe and Harwood of £30 each, and the other £10—and bound to keep the peace for two years. When the jury, on giving a verdict of guilty, recommended the prisoners to mercy, Mr Silvester, their counsel, asked Cobbett if he would join in the recommendation. "Certainly not, sir," replied Cobbett, bluntly; "I came here to ask for justice, and not for mercy." * Cobbett, however, writing afterwards on the subject in his Register, assumes merit to himself for having "rescinded the capital charge," and says that the counsel for the prisoners, whom he calls Mr Mackintosh, publicly acknowledged his clemency.†

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. i. p. 428.

† Register, vol. ii. p. 451; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 254.

CHAPTER VII.

Cobbett incurs the hostility of the London press—His retorts on the 'Morning Chronicle,' the 'Times,' and other papers—Remarks on the misrepresentations of the 'Observer' as to emigrants to America—Cobbett continues to support Pitt—Discontinues the 'Porcupine,' and commences the 'Weekly Political Register'—Cobbett's animadversions on the conduct of the English Ministry in regard to Buonaparte—Cobbett is not prosecuted, Peltier is—Cobbett's 'Important Considerations'—Publishes the letters of "Juverna" in the Register, and is brought to trial for a libel on the Irish Government—Result of the trial—Action brought against Cobbett by Plunkett, and its success—Effect of these trials on Cobbett—His subsequent observations on them.

It will hardly seem surprising that a man so bold and obstinate in manifesting his dislike of the peace, and in disseminating aristocratical principles, should incur the hostility of the numerous periodical publications in which opposite notions were maintained. He was censured, not only by his enemies, but by many of his friends, for having refused to illuminate his house, even had it been only for the peace of the metropolis, in other parts of which much damage was done, through the mob having been incited to a commencement of mischief by one man's obstinacy. But there were various other matters on which his rivals in journalism took occasion to annoy him. Nor was he less ready to retort than they were to assail. He was proceeding to reprint his 'Trial of Republicanism,' and

sent the advertisement of the book to the 'Morning Chronicle,' with the customary fee for its insertion, but Perry refused to receive it. Cobbett animadverted on his refusal thus: "The conduct of this paltry printer I should have treated with silent contempt, were it not a clear indication of the spirit and partialities of those by whom his publication is supported. These men are wont on all occasions to dwell with rapture on that inestimable blessing *the liberty of the press*, but if you attempt to make use of that press for the purpose of counteracting the effects of their falsehood and misrepresentations, they instantly have recourse to what they regard as the most effectual means of vengeance or of suppression. . . . Of loyalty they are ever full of profession; but if you inculcate love and veneration for the king, and a cheerful obedience to his commands; if you endeavour to show the superior excellence of monarchical government, to expose the vices of republicanism, or to excite horror at the crime of rebellion, then you perceive that all their loyal professions are but mere palliation of their disloyalty, extorted from them by the known, and as yet unperverted, sense and disposition of the people at large." But he declares that he shall never want the will to proceed in opposition to these writers; that no reproach or persecution shall dishearten him; and that he trusts his industry and economy will secure him the means of pursuing his object.

He soon directed his assaults or reprisals against other papers besides the 'Morning Chronicle.' Again inspired by Swift, he wrote the address of 'An Author to Prince Posterity,' giving a sarcastic account of

various newspapers of the day. He desires to inform his highness of the state of hebdomadal or ephemeral literature. He wonders where the writers of these papers obtained that genius and Christian inspiration which they so liberally exhibit. Yet he supposes that there must be many of which his highness has not heard even the titles. "I am sure," he says, "your highness never saw the 'World,' though it has long been at an end. The glances of the 'Argus' never encountered yours. The 'Public Advertiser,' I think, married the 'Gazetteer'; but both were in a decline at the time of their union, and consequently their offspring was weak and decrepit, and the whole progeny have since departed this life. The 'Oracle,' I can assure you, sublime sir, still continues to favour us with predictions and responses, in language clear and perspicuous as that of the Pythia, which, by the by, not one in a thousand could understand. . . . The 'Herald,' hatched by the same hen as the 'Morning Post,' crows sometimes in imitation of the Gallic cock, and sometimes brays in imitation of a British beast, his opposite neighbour. The 'Public Ledger,' a production which first attracted notice in the form of a nymph, whose bosom, being 'open to all parties,' was 'influenced by none,' caused her to be charged with false delicacy. . . . Of the 'Telegraph' I . . . shall content myself with observing that I have always been taught to believe that a telegraph was constructed for the purpose of rapidly communicating intelligence to the most distant quarters of the empire; the 'Telegraph,' however, of which I am speaking, so far from possessing the property of a rapid com-

munication of information, scarcely promulgates any which has not been known to the public for many days previously."

Thus he sneers at the inferior papers; but the 'Times,' also, to which he afterwards manifested such virulent hostility, is not suffered, even at this period of his career, to escape his lash. He introduces it to the notice of Prince Posterity as follows: "We have, I assure your highness on the word of an author—and his word ought to be taken on almost every subject—another paper, called the 'Times,' which from the first line to the last pretends to be a *compages* of informamation (authentic as the works of Diodorus Siculus, in which no one will look for authenticity at all), wit, humour, and education, the first borrowed, the second second-hand, and the third very much on a par with that of a schoolboy who has just learned to stammer out *Propria quæ maribus.* Therefore, if any one should whisper to you that the Times are bad, or ask, 'Did you ever see such stuff as the Times abound with?' I would wish to apprise you, sir, that he must mean the age in general, and not the paper whose exalted merit I am celebrating."

He concludes with the payment of a few more peculiar respects to the 'Morning Chronicle' and its editor. "We have also, may it please your sublime highness, a newspaper under the title of the 'Morning Chronicle,' which has been termed, from its intrepidity, *a political lion;* but I like not the appellation:

'A lion will not hurt the true prince.'

The royal beast has himself an attachment to royalty.

The greatest enemies of this celebrated and truly excellent production cannot accuse its conductors of any such attachment. The constellation of elegant authors, whose rays, through the medium of their paper, with a pure though lambent light, illuminate the whole of *the Jacobin world*, . . . still continue their laudable exertions under the direction of the learned editor, *whom I have seen*. Yes, your sublime highness, I have seen the editor of the 'Morning Chronicle,' a happiness which your highness will never enjoy so long as you continue to reside above, for he has always shown a particular predilection for sinking, and to what place he may sink at last is a problem very easy to be solved. But in the mean time, I repeat it, your sublime highness, I have enjoyed the supreme happiness of *seeing* the editor of the 'Morning Chronicle.' Where? you may ask. In a bookseller's shop, surrounded by a committee of gaping politicians, some of the greatest wits of the age, though not quite so wise as himself, for I think, and he thinks too, that he possesses twice the genius of Shakespeare. I have seen him, like Cato, giving laws to his little senate. I have frequently read his paper. . . . I have sincerely joined with him in lamentation at any occasional ill-success on the part of the kingdom and its allies, and have with equal zeal, fervour, and animation, exulted on the depression of our enemies. I have turned to that part of it which is dedicated to wit and humour, and have chuckled when, under the signature of Caspar Hargrave and other appellations, he has endeavoured to hold up some of the most respectable characters of the age to ridicule, and have been vexed that the arrows, which he had

taken so much pains to poise with lead, had fallen short of the mark. I have seen, sir, in a late 'Morning Chronicle,' the columns——but for fear the authors of that valuable production should reply to me in the way that the celebrated Lord Rochester did to a man that had seen many things, I shall, at least until I see how this eulogium is received, postpone the communication of my further discoveries, and conclude with repeating to you that I am, sir, with deference and respect," &c.

The 'Observer' is not mentioned in the foregoing enumeration of papers; but Cobbett did not spare it more than the others. He took occasion, from one of its articles giving a flattering picture of the condition of English emigrants to America, to expose, as he says, the misrepresentations of "that vehicle of falsehood and malice," which desired to alienate the affections of Englishmen from their native country. He gives, from his own knowledge, a humorous description of the real situation of several emigrants whom the 'Observer' had asserted to be in the midst of wealth and luxury. A Mr Humphries of Birmingham, for instance, was stated to be in possession of a beautiful seat on the Susquehanna; but Cobbett says, "Concerning Mr Humphries' beautiful seat I have never heard a word; and beautiful seats are so very rare in that republican country, that I am fully persuaded I should have heard of it had it been in existence. Mr Humphries, however, I know. In the winter of 1798-99 I let him have some partridges to turn out in his farm, which, from that circumstance, I am sure was near Philadelphia, but it had not acquired celebrity enough for

me to have heard of it or its owner, who was till that time a stranger to me. I remember I lent him some buckwheat for his partridges. . . . He was a very good man at borrowing, but as to repayment, it was a word of which he knew not the meaning, or, if he did, he brought it not with him to America.

"Mr Ryland of Birmingham, and Messrs Eddowes and Cooper from Chester, are also located in the same district as the foregoing gentleman. Of the two former I know no more than that they added two to the number of fools already settled in that part of the country. Cooper was originally a lawyer; he attempted to follow that profession at Sunbury, but failed for want of fools to trust him with their causes."

Of Mr Conger, once member of Parliament for Bristol, but afterwards among the number of emigrants, "Little," says Cobbett, "when I saw poor Conger at New York —little did I imagine that he had ever been a member of the British Parliament. Yet I know not why I should be astonished at it. *Mr Sheridan is a member of that body, and so was Horne Tooke.*"

Some others of the American settlers he notices in a similar strain, and then fixes on two of somewhat greater notoriety.

"Archibald Hamilton Rowan, who," the 'Observer' says, "lived in splendour at a country seat in the neighbourhood of Philadelphia, never lived in the neighbourhood of that city in his life. He purchased a miserable cotton-manufactory near Wilmington, in the State of Delaware, which, being first *insured*, was *accidentally* burnt to the ground, as it had been once before. It did not repeat its phœnix-like operation,

and Rowan took to brewing spruce-beer, a trade which is generally carried on by the free negroes. Having received remittances from his wife, he quitted his brewing business and lived a little more at his ease, but as to country seat or town seat, he has none. While he was a brewer, I myself heard several persons say that they saw him wheeling a barrow in Wilmington, and heard them regret that he was not chained to it for life.

"James Napper Tandy," says the 'Observer,' "is also *settled* at Philadelphia. That he re-emigrated is well known. While he was there he was so detested that no man of fair reputation would suffer him to enter his house. He took a small tenement out on the commons, but as soon as the owner knew the character of his tenant, he gave him notice to quit. To the great honour of the natives of America, they have uniformly expressed, and made appear, the sincerity of their abhorrence of the emigrated traitors."

Of all writers in the daily and weekly journals he used to express at times such contempt as to wish that he could have them drawn up in Hyde Park for review, in order that the nation might see what a mean, rascally, shabby, despicable set they were who presumed to take upon themselves to direct public opinion.

Pitt he continued to support, and to defend him against the attacks of adversaries. A French journalist, in ignorance or malice, had asserted that Pitt was in possession of places worth £10,000 a-year. Cobbett published a contradiction of the falsehood, and a eulogy of Pitt, which, according to the declaration of Mr Windham, deserved to be read and circulated wherever

the names of Pitt and England were known. He told the Frenchman that Pitt's only place was that of Warden of the Cinque Ports, the profit of which was a very inadequate compensation for the time and labour that he had devoted to the service of his country. His means of procuring even the necessary conveniences of life were greatly abridged by the payment of interest on the debts which he had contracted during his administration, when public business had prevented him from attending to his own private affairs. He then drew an elaborate contrast between the lives and actions of Pitt and Fox, setting Pitt's youthful study against Fox's gambling, Pitt's untarnished political career against Fox's disregard for all motives but those of party, and various particular merits of the one against various particular demerits of the other. But while he was yet eulogising Pitt, he seems to have been gradually contracting a dislike for Pitt's demeanour towards him. If Pitt, as Cobbett relates, had condescended to meet him at Windham's, he showed no disposition to any further condescension. He could not but be aware of the support which Cobbett afforded him, but he appears to have regarded Cobbett as of such a station and origin as to preclude all personal connection between them. Pitt was haughty and unbending, not to Cobbett only, but to all with whom he had any concern. But Cobbett had pride as well as Pitt, and at length began to resent Pitt's haughtiness as if it were specially turned on himself. We shall see Cobbett's own bearing towards Pitt and others in authority as we proceed.

It was in November 1801 that he parted with his

property in the 'Porcupine,' which was incorporated with the 'True Briton,' the Ministerial paper in which Windham had offered him a share; and on the 16th of January 1802, he commenced his 'Weekly Political Register,' which was to spread his name more widely than it had yet gone, and which he continued without interruption till his death in 1835. He introduced his Register to the public with the following observations: "I presume that most of the gentlemen into whose hands this will fall are already informed that I was some months ago the proprietor and conductor of the 'Porcupine,' a daily paper which I established in 1800, and which, after passing into other hands, has been joined with the paper called the 'True Briton.' The remonstrances which, from all parts of the kingdom, I have received, since the tone and sentiments of the 'Porcupine' began to change, and more particularly since its junction with the 'True Briton,' point out to me the necessity of explaining on this occasion the circumstances attending a transfer in which my character as a public writer appears to be somewhat concerned.

"I came to England with the intention of confining myself to the business of bookselling, having already undergone a three years' slavery as conductor of a daily newspaper. But those tradesmen with whom I consulted on my arrival strongly recommended me to begin a daily paper here, where talents were to be found in such abundance, and on such moderate terms, that I should find myself totally relieved from the weight with which a similar establishment pressed me in America." He then proceeds to show how much he

was disappointed in his expectations, for he found the labour of conducting a daily paper in London, from the number of matters requiring attention to keep him on a par with his rivals, infinitely greater than that of a like undertaking on the other side of the water. To devote his whole time to it was impossible, unless he broke his engagements with his partner, and he was therefore obliged to relinquish it. But having been solicited, he says, by his friends, to resume in some way those labours, of which they had greatly overrated the importance, he had determined on attempting a weekly paper, which, he was persuaded, would be much better adapted than a daily one to promote the objects which he had in view. He hoped, by its means, "to contribute in some degree to the preserving of those ancient and holy institutions, those unsophisticated morals and natural manners, that well-tempered love of regulated liberty, and that just sense of public honour, on the preservation of which our national happiness and independence so essentially depend." A hint of some change arising, greater or less, in the politics of the writer is given in one of his letters to Addington: "I have no intention to range myself in a systematic opposition to his Majesty's Ministers, or to their measures. Such an opposition I disclaim. The first object which I have invariably had in view is to contribute my mite towards the support of the authority of that sovereign whom God has commanded me to honour and obey; and, as the means most likely to effect this object, I have generally endeavoured to support the measures of those who have been appointed to exercise that authority. If, therefore, I do now, or

shall in future, openly disapprove of *some* of the measures of his Majesty's present servants, religiously abstaining from every act and word tending to weaken the Government, and exerting all my feeble efforts to defend it against its enemies, foreign and domestic, I trust that you yourself, if I should happen at all to attract your notice, will have the justice to acquit me of inconsistency of conduct."

He commenced the publication of the Register by giving the first number away ; that is, sending it gratis to the chief political characters of the time, and to coffee-houses, club-rooms, and other places of public resort. The price afterwards fixed on it was tenpence, at which it was maintained for a considerable time. In February of the same year he also started a monthly paper in the French language, entitled 'Le Mercure Anglois de Cobbett,' 'Cobbett's English Mercury,' for circulation on the Continent.

We shall notice, as we proceed, a few of the more prominent articles that appeared in the eighty-eight large volumes of the Register—such at least as may serve to throw light on Cobbett's varying political opinions, or as have any bearing on his life and fortunes. Those who wish to gain a notion of its miscellaneous matter, without the labour of turning over the whole, may effect their purpose by consulting the Selections from it published by Cobbett's two sons, Messrs John and James Cobbett, in six large octavo volumes. But many even of these touch on topics only ephemeral, and though they were perused with keen interest by many readers of that day, present but few points of attraction to their posterity, unless they

chance to bear on facts or particulars on which those who inspect them wish to be informed. The articles directed against Buonaparte, to whom Cobbett bore no goodwill, will always command some attention. One of these appeared in August 1802, in which he bitterly reproaches the English Ministers for softening the tone of certain remarks which they were publishing on Buonaparte in the 'True Briton' and the 'Sun,' in consequence of an article that had appeared in the 'Moniteur,' threatening the English Government with the First Consul's displeasure if such animadversions were continued. Formerly, he said, high qualities were necessary to constitute a politician, but now no other capacity was requisite than that of *learning the will of Buonaparte*. Touching on the state of things in France, he pronounces the condition of the people under Louis XVI. to have been much better than their condition under Buonaparte, and decidedly prefers "the wooden shoes of 1789" to "the fetters of 1802." In consequence of such remarks, and others more disrespectful to the First Consul, the French Minister, M. Otto, was expressly directed by Buonaparte to request of the English Government that a criminal prosecution should be instituted against Cobbett for his satires on the French ruler. But it does not appear that any proceedings were ever commenced against him. The Ministry contented themselves with falling on Peltier, and ordering the Attorney-General to prosecute him for his libels in the 'Ambigu;' but he, though found guilty, in spite of Sir James Mackintosh's defence of him, was nevertheless left quite unharmed, having never been called up to receive judgment. The pro-

secution was intended to conciliate Buonaparte, but was not followed by any such effect. On the contrary, as Cobbett remarks, it only furnished the 'Moniteur' with an occasion for sneering and showing ill-nature, for it noticed the occurrence thus: "A person of the name of Peltier has been found guilty, before a court of justice at London, of printing and publishing some wretched libels against the First Consul. It is not easy to imagine why the English Ministry should affect to make this a matter of so much *éclat*. . . . The First Consul was even ignorant of Peltier's libels till they came to his knowledge in the public accounts of this trial."

In May 1803, when, the peace of Amiens being broken, war was again declared against France, and Buonaparte was threatening to invade England, Cobbett wrote a paper entitled 'Important Considerations for the People of this Kingdom,' which, through Mr John Reeves and Mr Yorke, he offered to the Government, who thought so highly of it that they caused several copies of it, at the expense of many thousand pounds, to be sent to every parish in the kingdom, to be read from the pulpits by the clergy, and to be circulated among the people. It was written with great force, but in a style rather more high-flown than that in which Cobbett generally expressed himself, and attributed the rupture of the peace to the faithlessness, ambition, and rapacity of Buonaparte. The authorship of it was kept secret by the Ministry; and Cobbett, though he printed it in his Register in July 1803, gave no intimation of its real parentage till 1809, when, being at variance with the Government on the questions of

Finance and Reform, and being annoyed by the Ministerial publications, he let his readers know that he had the merit of writing it. At the time of its appearance it was attributed to Lord Hawkesbury, Dr Horsley, and other eminent men; and John Reeves, from some report that had reached the ears of Queen Charlotte, was thanked by her Majesty at a drawing-room as being the author of so seasonable and serviceable a production, and seems not to have excused himself from the honour. Cobbett, after he was known to be the author, was offered pecuniary remuneration, which must have been something handsome, but declined to accept it.*

But in the same year, 1803, the eyes of the Government were directed on him with hostile glances. The cause of their displeasure was as follows: The Administration of Ireland, at the head of which Mr Addington had placed Lord Hardwicke, was but weak, and had become unpopular; Emmett's conspiracy, perhaps the result of its inefficiency, had, though ridiculous as an attempt to overthrow it, caused much damage and disorder in Dublin and the neighbourhood; and, in the general excitement, there were numbers of discontented spirits, both in Ireland and England, ready to assail any authorities to whom blame for such a state of things could be attributed. In Cobbett's Register, in the months of November and December, appeared certain letters signed "Juverna," containing severe reflections on the Earl of Hardwicke, the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland; on Lord Redesdale, the Irish Lord Chancellor; on Mr Justice Osborn, one of the Irish

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 303.

judges; and on Mr Alexander Marsden, the Under-Secretary of State for Ireland. For the publication of these letters, which were regarded as libels, Cobbett was summoned to answer to the charge of having endeavoured to excite in the subjects of the King contempt of his Majesty's authority. Of these alleged libels, the one considered most malignant commenced thus:—

"'*Equo ne credite, Teucri,*' was the advice which, in a dangerous moment, Laocoon gave to the Trojans. It will be remembered that the *equus* against which the sagacious adviser cautioned his countrymen, was a *wooden* one. His countrymen did not regard Laocoon; they received the *wooden* representation of wisdom; they approached it as if it possessed authority and power. Its *wooden* head towered above their houses. But though the machine itself was innoxious wood, the credulous Trojans found its hollow head and exalted sides were nothing less than receptacles for greedy speculators and bloodthirsty assassins. The ingenious author of the story did not mean to confine the lesson which it inculcates to the tale of Troy alone. He meant to take advantage of that easy metaphorical expression, which, by the common assent of mankind, has moulded itself into most languages, and by which a certain species of head (which the moderns, by various moral experiments, have ascertained to be a non-conductor of ideas) has been denominated *a wooden head*. He meant to caution future nations not to put trust or confidence in the apparent innocence of any *such wooden instrument*, and not to suffer themselves to be led to exalt it into consequence, or to pay it any respect. He meant to tell them that any people who

submitted to be governed by a wooden head would not find their security in its supposed innoxiousness, as its hollowness would soon be occupied by instruments of mischief."

When he found Ireland, the writer proceeds to say, overwhelmed with evils resulting from the rapacity of Mr Marsden and his friends, and from the general bad government of Lord Hardwicke, he thought it his duty, notwithstanding the fate of Laocoon, to reiterate the cry, *Equo ne credite, Teucri.* "Not," he continues, "that I would be understood literally. I do not mean to assert that the head of my Lord Hardwicke is absolutely built of timber. My application, like that of the original author of the tale, is only metaphorical. Yet at the same time I cannot avoid suspecting that if the head of his Excellency were submitted to the analysis of any such investigator of nature as Lavoisier, it would be found to contain a superabundant portion of particles of a very ligneous tendency. This is the Lord Hardwicke of Doctor Addington, against whose government not a murmur of complaint has been heard, while our property has been subjected to the plunder of his clerks." Seeing that such was the state of things under his lordship's government, he thought it his duty to make inquiries about his lordship's self, and the result was, he learned, "he was in rank an earl, in manners a gentleman; in morals a good father and a kind husband; and that he had a good library in St James's Square. Here I should have been for ever stopped," he adds, "if I had not by accident met with one Mr Lindsay, a Scotch parson, since become (and I am sure it must be by divine Providence, for it would

be impossible to account for it by secondary causes) Bishop of Killaloe, in Ireland. From this Mr Lindsay I farther learned that my Lord Hardwicke was celebrated for understanding the modern method of fattening sheep as well as any man in Cambridgeshire." However, in justice to Dr Addington, it must be acknowledged, he says, that the Doctor did not intrust the interests of Ireland wholly to "a very eminent sheep-feeder from Cambridgeshire," but took care that the sheep-feeder should be assisted in his counsels by "a very able and strong-built Chancery-pleader from Lincoln's Inn," a designation of Lord Redesdale, the Irish Chancellor. The passages relating to Justice Osborn reflected on him for having made a foolish charge to a jury in the county of Antrim, in which, apparently under corrupt influence from the Government, he had represented the state of the country as much better than it was. Mr Marsden was accused of being a bad instrument of an inefficient Lord-Lieutenant, and a rapacious plunderer of the property of the State.

The array of counsel on the side of the Crown, six of the most eminent pleaders of the day, indicated a determination to insure a conviction if possible. There was Perceval, the Attorney-General, afterwards Prime Minister; Sir Vicary Gibbs, then Solicitor-General; Dallas, who became Chief-Justice of the Common Pleas; Abbott, afterwards Lord Tenterden; Erskine, and Garrow. On the side of the defendant there were only Mr Adams and Mr Richardson. The judge was Lord Ellenborough, and the trial commenced on the 24th of May 1804.

The Attorney-General, in addressing the jury, said that these statements were not to be considered as the hasty or inadvertent expressions of a man who, in the fair discharge of his profession as a public writer, had ventured a little beyond the line of propriety, but as cool and deliberate endeavours to degrade and vilify the whole administration of his Majesty's Government in Ireland. Had the libels been simply libels on the eminent persons named, those persons might have treated them with silent disdain, but they were endeavours to bring the whole Irish Government into contempt, by lowering the estimation of those by whom the Government was conducted. By calling Lord Hardwicke "a very eminent feeder of sheep from Cambridgeshire," and Lord Redesdale "a very able and strong-built Chancery-pleader from Lincoln's Inn," the defendant had evidently sought to represent those personages as unfit for the duties of their offices. As for Lord Hardwicke's head, although it was admitted to be not absolute timber, it was described as being no proper head for the governor of a great country. The charges against Mr Justice Osborn and Mr Marsden impugned their moral conduct; and were not all these libels as dangerous to the peace and tranquillity of Ireland as anything that could have been published? If it should be said that Mr Cobbett was not the writer, but only the publisher, of these libels, he is equally answerable legally, and equally chargeable with malicious intent, as if he were the author of them.

Mr Adams, on the part of Cobbett, endeavoured to show that the remarks in the Register on Lord

Hardwicke, and the other personages concerned in the government of Ireland, animadverting on them only as public characters, did not go beyond what might be considered the fair liberty of the press, or deserve to be brought under the definition of libels. If the Attorney-General, he argued, in one of the strongest passages of his speech, might lay restraints on the press according to his own judgment, and prohibit the publication of all that he considered improper, we should then have no standard to which to appeal, for "what might appear decent in the opinion of one Attorney-General, might appear ungentlemanlike and scurrilous in the opinion of another; and thus the freedom of discussion relative to public men and public measures would depend, not upon a point of right, but upon the taste of the Attorney-General." He also dwelt largely upon the excellences of Cobbett's private character, asserting that he had always appeared as a member of society much more inclined to support the Government of Great Britain and Ireland than to weaken or overthrow it. Several witnesses were then called to attest his loyalty, among whom were Mr Windham and the Honourable Charles Yorke.

Lord Ellenborough summed up. He said that he had always been of opinion that an English jury, in such cases as the present, had the right of judging, not only of the fact of publication, but of the nature and tendency of the thing published. There was no impunity under the law of England, he observed, for any person publishing anything hurtful to the character and welfare of an individual, or detrimental to the general interests of the State. The jury had now to consider whether what

had been published by Mr Cobbett was of such a description as to be injurious to individuals or to the country. To alienate the affections of a people from a Government by bringing that Government, whether by ridicule or obloquy, into disesteem, must be considered as a crime. To sneer at the people of Ireland as "submitting to be governed by a wooden head," must be regarded as an instigation of the Irish to rebellion. The other reflections on the other members of the Irish Government could not but be esteemed as of like tendency. Remarks might be made by public writers on the conduct and character of public men, but not with unlimited licence.

The jury, having paused about ten minutes, gave a verdict of GUILTY. Cobbett was then committed to the King's Bench until he should be brought up for judgment; a proceeding which was delayed till the 9th of July, when he was sentenced to pay a fine of £500.

Two days afterwards he was subjected to another process of a similar nature. This was a civil action brought against him by Mr Plunkett, Solicitor-General for Ireland, for a libel contained in the same portions of the Register in which the libels for which he had just been sentenced had appeared. Plunkett laid the damages which he asserted his character to have received from Cobbett at *ten thousand pounds*. Lord Ellenborough was again judge, with the same jury; and the counsel for Plunkett were Erskine, Garrow, Dampier, and Nolan. Cobbett employed the same two defenders as before. The charge against Cobbett was that he had represented Plunkett, when, in the exercise of his office, he prose-

cuted Robert Emmett for rebellion, as having wantonly abused his prerogative, in a speech on the evidence, by excessive objurgation of the prisoner; an outrage which was the more atrocious, inasmuch as Emmett's father had been the friend and benefactor of Plunkett, who had accordingly played the part of the viper which stung the bosom that had warmed it. Nay, it was even asserted in the libel that Plunkett had himself instilled into Emmett the principles which had made him a rebel, the effects of which were then bringing him to the scaffold. Such conduct as was thus imputed to Plunkett would have been brutal, said Erskine in his opening speech, even if Emmett had been a perfect stranger to him, instead of being, as he was termed, "the dying son of his former friend." Could the writer, he asked, have believed this to be true when he published it? And was it to be tolerated that he should persist in the publication of such groundless libels, which he was selling even to that very hour, and preserving in volumes, the more effectually to disgrace the character of the plaintiff to future times?

As Cobbett offered no justification of the alleged libel, nor gave any intimation that it was founded on truth, Mr Adams, his counsel, acknowledged that some damages must be given, but argued, in mitigation of damages, that Cobbett would be ruined by the infliction of such a sum as Plunkett demanded, and that Plunkett had in reality suffered no injury by Cobbett's publication, since he was still in the enjoyment of the same honours and emoluments, and held in the same general esteem, as he was before Cobbett had printed anything against him.

Lord Ellenborough, in commenting on the case, observed that the gravamen of the charge lay in the passage in which it was alleged that Plunkett was Emmett's seducer before he was his accuser, and that he had wantonly lashed the pupil of his own sedition, the son of the man to whom he was under family obligations; exhibiting to the Court "a scene," in Cobbett's own language, "such as Lord Kenyon would have turned away from with horror; a scene in which, though guilt was in one part to be punished, yet, in the whole drama, justice was confounded, humanity outraged, and loyalty insulted." To say of an officer of the Crown, a public prosecutor, whose accusations might cause the death of a criminal, that he acted in such a scene, and in such a manner, was, said his lordship, to assert that he was regardless of every principle of justice, and to attempt to sink him to the lowest state of moral degradation. The jury, after retiring for about twenty minutes, awarded the same amount of damages as in the former case, £500.

From these verdicts, however, Cobbett's purse did not suffer, for Mr Johnson, an Irish barrister, afterwards a judge, acknowledged himself, on Cobbett's conviction, the author of the letters of "Juverna," and the fines were either paid by him or not paid at all. It is observable that Cobbett appears to have allowed nothing to be stated, on either of the trials, to intimate that he himself was not the writer of the letters. Why he should thus have withheld all indication that he was only the publisher, whether he knew the author or not, is not easy to be conjectured, and is the more extraordinary if, as seems likely, he did not know him.

But the result of the proceedings was very offensive to Cobbett, and tended to make him discontented with the Government against which he had not yet openly rebelled. He had thought himself at liberty to print in his Register, either in his own name or that of another, that a Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland who had failed to gain public confidence was deserving of little esteem; and that a Solicitor-General who had exceeded legal licence of speech ought to be censured for his arrogance or unfeelingness; and when he was brought to trial for such observations, he probably felt certain of acquittal. But the resolution of the Government to convict, and the heaviness of the sentences, he regarded as at once oppressive and insulting.

He was accused at the time by several writers in the public press, and especially by Leigh Hunt, of the 'Examiner,' of having proposed to the Government, when he found that proceedings were going against him, to discontinue his Register on certain conditions; and of this charge he offered no denial, though he allowed others, who thought proper to stand forward in his behalf, to deny it for him.

Among his defenders on this point was Henry Hunt, who declared his belief that so bold and determined a writer as Cobbett could not have been guilty of such political delinquency as to have made advances to the Government in order to avoid pecuniary or other inconvenience. Hunt was then in communication with Cobbett, though they had not yet met; but Cobbett never signified to him that the allegations were false, leaving him to act as his volunteer champion if he

pleased, and to bear the brunt of all assaults that he thought proper to draw upon himself.

It has been commonly stated by Cobbett's biographers that he made no comments on these trials, but contented himself with publishing in his Register bare reports of them. He never, indeed, made any direct comments on them, but, in a paper published in his Register in 1808, he showed, by some indirect animadversions on them, that they had not even then ceased to trouble him. He took occasion for his reflections from the trial of Hood and another, two publishers, for a libel on Sir John Carr as an author, the libel being in the form of a satire entitled 'My Pocket-Book, or Notes for a ryghte merrie and conceited Tour,' intended to throw ridicule on Sir John's published accounts of his travels. Cobbett took the motto for his remarks from Lord Ellenborough's speech on his own trial for the libel on the Earl of Hardwicke, in which Lord Ellenborough said that, when, in remarks on public characters, "individual feelings are violated, the line of interdiction begins, and the offence becomes the subject of penal visitation." On these words, Cobbett observed that it might now be considered dangerous for any public writer to speak of any public character without praising him, for even to withhold praise from him might hurt his feelings. But, as the publishers of the satire on Sir John Carr were acquitted, and as it was consequently pronounced allowable, by Lord Ellenborough, to hurt the feelings of a bad author by ridiculing him, Cobbett asked why permission should be given to hurt the feelings of an author more than those of a

Minister of State; and why, if we should by accident see a fool in office, we should not be at liberty to expose his folly? "Suppose," says he, "I had an opportunity of knowing several men, pretending to office and power, to be totally unqualified for any business, and totally unworthy of any trust, would it not be very useful to communicate my knowledge to the public?" He also wrote a 'Letter to Lord Ellenborough,' in the same year, in which he urged the same doctrine; arguing that other persons as well as authors, whose doings tended to injure the public, might justly be subject to ridicule; hoping that the result of the trial would be a right way of thinking in regard to writers; and thanking his lordship for promoting the liberty of the press.

On this trial of Carr *versus* Hood, the Attorney-General, Sir Vicary Gibbs, who was for the defendant, observed that "Socrates was a great author, and he was reviewed by Aristotle, who was also a great writer, yet it did not affect the merits of the works of Socrates;" and Lord Ellenborough, in alluding to this passage of Mr Attorney's speech, entirely concurred with him, noticing how philosophy and science might be advanced by the opposition of one great man to another, and "repeated the observations of the Attorney-General on the subject."*

* Report of the trial of Carr *v.* Hood; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. ii. p. 406, 407.

CHAPTER VIII.

Cobbett is inclined to turn against Pitt—Hi six letters to Pitt—His subsequent reflections on Pitt's character—His hostility to Pitt's financial proceedings—Descends to connection with Major Cartwright and Hunt—His animadversions on the King's application to Parliament for grants of money to his children—His remarks on the public appearance of the Duke of Clarence with Mrs Jordan—His depreciation of the learned languages; exposure of it—Attempts to become member for Honiton—Takes a farm at Botley—How he lived there—Large sale of the Register—His observations on the case of the Duke of York and Mrs Clarke—Prosecuted for a libellous article on the flogging of some soldiers at Ely—Convicted—What he said in his defence—Sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

COBBETT was now drawing every day nearer and nearer to a conjunction with the party to which he had hitherto been opposed. In the year 1804, in different numbers of his Register, he addressed six letters to Pitt, in which he told him that he had supported him as long as he professed to prosecute the war with France with a certain object—the object of humbling the French power, or restraining it within certain limits—but that when he made peace with France without that object having been attained, he thought it time to withdraw his support from him. These letters are well worthy of perusal, though there are many notions advanced in them, on financial and other matters, to which many readers may be disinclined to assent. He reproaches Pitt with having acted towards his country, in regard to France, in a

way which no true patriot can approve. "The virtue of patriotism," he observes, "has its foundation in the anxious desire, which every man of sound sense and honest nature has, to see preserved untarnished the reputation of that country which he is obliged to own, whose name he can never shake off, from whose calamities he may possibly flee, but in all whose disgraces he must inevitably share. What, for instance, induced me," he asks, alluding to the time that he lived in America, "when so far distant from my country, voluntarily to devote myself to her cause? Her commerce? I neither knew nor cared anything about it. Her funds? I was so happy as hardly to understand the meaning of the word. Her lands? I could, alas! lay claim to nothing but the graves of my parents. What, then, was the stimulus? What was I proud of? It was the name and fame of England. Her laws, her liberties, her justice, her might; all the qualities and circumstances that had given her renown in the world; but, above all, her deeds in arms, her military glory." This glory he accuses Pitt of having unwisely and unpatriotically dimmed and tarnished. When the French plenipotentiaries, in their negotiations with the English Government in November 1797, required that the King of England should resign the title of King of France, Pitt had consented, calling the title "a harmless feather" of royalty, which might well be relinquished, instead of considering it, as he ought to have done, an honourable memorial of our successes in arms, a sacred relic which our ancestors had preserved with religious care, and which their descendants should feel the utmost solicitude to preserve. He had also surrendered the

honour of the flag, for which in other treaties there had been a stipulation, but in that of Amiens none. These concessions, complained Cobbett, instead of soothing the enemy, had only encouraged him to make fresh demands. France was not subdued or put in fear; on the contrary, there never was a time when England stood so much in awe of her as at present. Any change that Cobbett had shown in his sentiments in regard to Pitt had been caused by Pitt's departure from his principles, while he himself, he said, had strictly adhered to his; and, as he now necessarily differed from Pitt, it was no wonder if he seemed to approach somewhat nearer to the side of Fox. When Pitt went out of office, having resigned on account of the King's opposition to the Catholic Relief Bill, it did not seem desirable, in Cobbett's opinion, that he should return to office. But whatever opposition he had shown to Pitt, it had been, he asserted, however decided, fair and just. "I never have had recourse," said he, "and never shall have recourse, to any of those arts which have been but too often employed against myself. I have never wilfully and deliberately misstated any fact; I have never, except from want of talent, made use of a sophistical argument, or intentionally left a false inference to be drawn; and I never have, on any occasion, addressed myself to, or wished for success from, the vice, the ignorance, or the prejudice, of any description of people. The uniform intention, and, I will add, the uniform effect, of my writings have been, and are, to counteract the efforts of the enemies of monarchy in general, and of the monarchy of England in particular, under whatever guise or denomination those

enemies have appeared; to check the spirit and oppose the progress of levelling innovation, whether proceeding from clubs of Jacobins, companies of traders, synagogues of saints, or boards of the Government; to cherish an adherence to long-tried principles, an affection for ancient families and ancient establishments; to inculcate an unshaken attachment to the person and office of the King, an obedience to the laws, a respect for the magistracy, a profound veneration for the Church, and a devotion of fortune and of life to the liberties and glory of the country." Such were Cobbett's declarations as to the nature and influence of what he had hitherto written, and it cannot be said that there is much of misrepresentation or exaggeration in them. Pitt's financial system he strongly decried, maintaining that, with the increasing issue of paper-money, and the restriction on the Bank from payments in gold, the depreciation of the Funds would proceed with constantly accelerating rapidity, till the whole system would of itself fall to atoms, and the nation be ruined.

He afterwards attacked Pitt on his support of Lord Melville, whom Pitt had defended in the House of Commons, as having been guilty of no delinquency, because he had paid over to his successor the balance remaining in his hands, though it was satisfactorily proved that, by the malversations of his lordship and his secretary Trotter, in the Admiralty, the country had suffered a loss of several millions. Another of his topics for constant abuse of Pitt was his loan to Boyd and Benfield, two contractors, members of Parliament, of £40,000 of the public money without interest, in order to secure their votes. When Pitt died, in January

1806, Cobbett denied that the character for disinterestedness which had been ascribed to him had been deserved, because, to procure himself supporters, he had made grants and pensions to public personages and their relatives to the amount of half a million a-year; and because, though he gave away the Clerkship of the Pells, and thus relieved the nation of the payment of £3000 a-year, he yet, during the subsequent years of his life, ran recklessly into debt to the extent of £40,000, which the people, who had applauded his integrity and generosity, were called upon to pay.

In opposing himself to the "funding system," he professes—after having read Adam Smith and George Chalmers without profit, and after having consulted, with no greater advantage, all the Acts of Parliament connected with the Bank from the time of William III. —to have become the pupil of that Thomas Paine of whom he had previously expressed such scorn. He read, he says, in 1803, Paine's 'Decline and Fall of the English System of Finance,' which set the delusive state and prospects of the English Funds clearly before his view. From that time he declared it his settled conviction that either the interest on the national debt must be reduced, if not altogether abolished, or that the monarchy must at length sink under the burden of taxation. Windham and his friend Dr Laurence, a man knowing in pecuniary matters, differed from Cobbett on this point; but Cobbett obstinately adhered to what he had asserted, and professed, after deliberating by what means the system might best be counteracted, to come to the conclusion that Parliamentary Reform, which he had so often and vehemently

decried, was the only measure by which the nation could be saved from financial ruin.

The maintenance of these notions gradually inclined him towards the reforming party of that day. He turned from Pitt to Fox, and from Fox to Major Cartwright and Sir Francis Burdett, and declared that no measures but such as they proposed could overthrow those great nuisances, the "Paper Aristocracy" and the "Stock-jobbing Interest." *

It was at this period of his life that he became personally acquainted with Henry Hunt, who, delighted with the tone that the Register was taking, entered into correspondence with Cobbett, and at length sought an interview with him. He was anxious that they should co-operate in promoting liberty and reform; Cobbett by his writings, and himself by his stump oratory. He called by appointment at Cobbett's house in Duke Street, Westminster, and was shown, he says, into a room totally unfurnished, where he was joined by "a tall, robust man, with a florid face, his hair cut quite close to his head, and himself dressed in a blue coat and scarlet waistcoat." He addressed Hunt briefly and bluntly, saying, "We must persevere, and we shall bring all the scoundrels to justice;" language that showed he was adopting the slang of the Radicals. Hunt, however, went away disappointed; displeased with his cool reception, and not at all anxious for another meeting; nor did he think it likely that they should ever act in close concert, as they did some years afterwards, though their intercourse was often interrupted by violent quarrels.

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 301, 440, 441.

As soon as Pitt's debts were paid, another subject came before Parliament, which excited Cobbett's wrath in such a degree as to provoke him to the utterance of many remarks that were scarcely consistent with the respect which he professed for kingly government. A message was sent from his Majesty to his faithful Commons, requesting them to augment the incomes of the junior branches of his family, in accordance with the requirements of the circumstances of the times and the decrease in the value of money. Cobbett sneered at the effects of the heaven-born Minister's measures, which had so much depreciated money that the members of the royal family could no longer live upon their allowances. Lord Grenville expressed his surprise that his Majesty had not made the application sooner; and Lord Henry Petty proposed a grant of £6000 a-year to each of the royal family, with the exception of the Duke of York, who professed his unwillingness to receive any further addition to his income from the people; but the truth was, that the Duke did not dare to receive such addition; for some member of the Opposition, unfriendly to such grants, would probably have pointed out an item on the credit side of the Civil List, in the following words: "By amount of sums advanced to his Royal Highness the Duke of York, to be paid by instalments of £1000 quarterly, £54,000, 17s. 6d.;" none of which instalments had in all likelihood been paid. Cobbett remarked that the supplies thus demanded for the royal family would amount to £51,000 a-year; and intimated that the King and Queen themselves, instead of allowing the nation to be burdened with this sum, might furnish

it, or all that was really needed of it, out of their own royal incomes and unemployed funds, especially when it was considered that all the male branches of the royal family held posts and preferments from which they derived salaries and emoluments that they did not receive at the time when their pensions were granted. But if it were resolved to make these additions to the incomes of the royal family from the funds of the nation, it must certainly be the desire of every good subject to see such sums judiciously and honourably expended, and not in the way in which they are proved to be spent by such accounts as the following, which appeared in several of the London newspapers. That which was given in the 'Courier' of August 3, 1806, Cobbett faithfully transcribed into his Register.*

"The Duke of Clarence's birthday was celebrated with much splendour at Bushey Park on Thursday. About five o'clock, the Prince of Wales, the Dukes of York, Kent, Sussex, and Cambridge, arrived from reviewing the German Legion. After they had dressed for dinner, they walked in the pleasure-grounds, accompanied by the Lord Chancellor, Earl and *Countess* of Athlone and *daughter,* Lord Leicester, Baron Hotham and *Lady* Baron Eden, the Attorney-General, Colonels Paget and M'Mahon, Sergeant Marshall, and a number of other persons. At seven o'clock the second bell announced the dinner, when *the Prince took Mrs Jordan by the hand, led her into the dining-room, and seated her at the head of the table. The Prince took his seat at her right hand, and the Duke of York at her*

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iii. p. 69.

left. The Duke of Cambridge sat next to the Prince, the Duke of Kent next to the Duke of York, and the Lord Chancellor next to his Royal Highness. The Duke of Clarence sat at the foot of the table. . . . After dinner *the Duke's numerous family were introduced*, and admired by the Prince, royal dukes, and the whole of the company."

"I have given the particulars of this disgraceful business," adds Cobbett, "and I wish to see the statement contradicted by order of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales or of some of his brothers. . . . I venture to beseech them, above all things, to reflect upon what must be the natural and inevitable effect produced in the minds of the people if they were once to believe that any portion of the grants made out of the taxes, in times like the present, was expended upon objects such as those described in this publication; and as I have, in proportion to my means and capacity, done as much as any private individual ever did in support of the throne and the reputation of the royal family, I hope it will not be thought presumptuous now that I make them a tender of my pages and my pen, for the purpose of making and promulgating that contradiction which every truly loyal subject is so anxious to see." Of this offer, of course, no notice was taken; and Cobbett, indeed, was very well aware that what all the London press had left uncontroverted was true.

One of the subjects which Cobbett next attacked was the learned languages, taking occasion from the appearance of the words *uti possidetis* in some public document, which phrase, he said, might better have

been given in plain English than in a jargon which few understand. The use of the learned languages, as they are called, operated, he declared, as a bar to the acquirement of real learning. But, he added, "I hear some pedagogue or pedant exclaim, 'This is precisely the reasoning of the fox without a tail.' To bring this matter to the test I hereby invite the *learned* gentlemen of the two universities to a discussion on the subject. I assert that *what they call the learned languages are improperly so called*, and that *as a part of general education they are worse than useless*. Two months will afford time for any of the gentlemen just spoken of to disprove these positions. I will therefore give them until Lady Day next. I will publish their defence of their calling; and if I do not fairly beat them in the controversy—and that, too, in the space of twenty columns of the Register—I will then beg their pardon, and will allow that to be able to speak or write a language which the people do not understand is a proof of learning." This challenge was not unanswered; for Cobbett received between forty and fifty communications on the subject, many of them from men of high classical attainments, and of abilities that well fitted them to argue with such a debater. One of these addresses, which he published, according to his promise, hit him very hard on many points, exposing especially his presumption in turning from political topics, of which he was qualified to treat, to touch on matters of which he had no understanding. His comparison of himself to the fox in the fable, he was told, was not appropriate, inasmuch as the fox was conscious of his deficiency, while Cobbett was

insensible of his. He had stigmatised such phrases as *uti possidetis* as relics of the mummery of monkery, but was informed that the mummery of monkery it was the object of classical learning to abolish. He was assured that if he had studied, and could appreciate, what the ancients had written, he would not decry their writings as unworthy of attention. He was asked whether he knew how much the discovery of classical manuscripts, and the dispersion and study of them, had contributed to the present improved state of literature and society. He was told to reflect that when he bade students disregard classical literature, he in fact asserted that the proper way to acquire learning was to neglect a chief part of it. He was desired to compare what had been done since the revival of letters by men of classical culture and men to whom such culture was unknown. Such argumentation Cobbett had sense enough to see that he was in no condition to answer, and withdrew from the contest, making no attempt to produce even a single page of his threatened refutation.*

In June 1806 he made his first attempt to get into Parliament. Colonel Bosville, a leading man among the early reformers, encouraged him to offer himself for Honiton, a Government borough, where a vacancy had occurred in consequence of Bradshaw, the representative, having accepted an office in the Irish Exchequer. The Colonel took him down from London to Honiton in his carriage, and Mr Cochrane Johnstone went with them, in the hope that his nephew, Lord Cochrane, who was stationed at Plymouth, would be able to leave his

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 72 *seq.*

post in time to present himself as a candidate, and that he might give his lordship some support. In the mean time, while Lord Cochrane's coming was doubtful, Cobbett, in order that Bradshaw, who sought to be re-elected, might not be unopposed, declared his resolution to stand; and some of the electors who had sold their votes, told him that he had their hearts, though Bradshaw had their voices; but as Lord Cochrane arrived soon enough to offer himself, Cobbett did not go to the poll. He, however, addressed two letters to the electors, in which he expatiated on Government abuses, and declared, as he did several times afterwards, that he would never, on any account, receive a farthing of the public money.* As to being a member of Parliament, "For my own sake," he told the people of Honiton, "I have no desire to be in the House of Commons; for, though it would be contemptible affectation to pretend to doubt of my ability to discharge the duties of a member of that House, yet my habits do not lead me that way, nor any way that takes me from my home. But if I think that I can serve the country more effectually by becoming a member of Parliament, a member of Parliament I will, if I can in the constitutional way, certainly become." According to his sons, it was "the close view of corruption" that he obtained during this affair that led him so heartily to join the party of clamourers for a radical reform of Parliament; a scheme to which he had previously been adverse, because he thought that no *real reform* could result from it as long as the paper-money and funding systems were continued.†

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. ii. p. 80, 126.
† Ibid., vol. ii. p. 51, 81.

The nation, he now thought, must destroy the debt, or the debt must destroy the nation.*

Being, from early habit, fond of agricultural occupation, he was tempted, during a trip into Hampshire, to take some land at Botley, a village a few miles from Southampton, where he went to reside, according to his sons, in 1806; but two of his letters to Pitt, written in 1804, are dated from Botley, so that he must have been in connection with the place at an earlier date. Here he had a house and two farms called Fairthorne and Raglington, and two other smaller ones. † When he entered on residence there, he endeavoured to make himself popular with the labouring class, by encouraging, in agreement with Windham's views, the cultivation of rural sports, and offered prizes, in concert with some farmers of the neighbourhood, for the best players at singlestick. ‡ He affected also, for a time, a strict preservation of the game (though the game-laws, in after years, were an object of his wrath), and "kept sometimes from thirty to forty dogs, greyhounds, pointers, setters, and spaniels." He even prosecuted a poacher, by suing him for trespass. § And he seems, though not chargeable with what may be called extravagance, to have spent his money pretty freely.

The Register held on its course, increasing in circulation. As early as 1803 it had reached the weekly sale of at least four thousand. As it gradually assumed an attitude of hostility to the Government, the Ministry, as Cobbett relates, resorted to various devices to put it

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. ii. p. 28, 34.
† Ibid., vol. iii. p. 374. ‡ Ibid., vol. i. p. 258.
§ Rural Rides, edited by J. P. Cobbett, p. 670, note (199).

down, and, among other artifices, attempted the establishment of six periodical papers, of different forms, in the hope of working its destruction. In these publications he was reviled, he says, sometimes as "an incendiary," sometimes as "a libeller," sometimes "an impostor," always as "the lying Cobbett," and once or twice as "a fool." But this abuse, he adds, did not retard his success. He was libelled in very good company; in that of all that opposed the Ministry, especially Lord Grenville and Mr Windham. His adversaries dropped off, one after another, like blighted fruit; and the Addingtons and the Hawkesburys found, much to their surprise, that, with thousands of secret-service money at command, they were unable to interrupt his daily-increasing influence; for his numerous readers only exclaimed, "Disprove his allegations, or discontinue your abuse."* His powerful language, indeed, and clear straightforward statements, whether true or false, could not fail to attract the attention of a large portion of the public. In 1807 he wrote twenty-five long letters to the electors of Westminster, one great object of which was to vilify Sheridan, who was a candidate for the representation of it; and in that and the following year, several dissertations on the poor-laws and other subjects, which it would now be useless to notice.

But in 1809 the boldness of a portion of his Register began to draw on him the notice of the Government. In the months of February, March, and April he put forth copious satirical comments on the evidence given on the Parliamentary inquiry into the complicity of the Duke of York with Mrs Clarke; large portions of

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. i. p. 321, 322.

which evidence, with his own remarks, he published in his pages week after week. What gave most offence was his censure of the character of the Duke, and his expression of doubt whether his word was to be believed. In regard to the lady, "there can be no doubt," he said, "that a woman like Mrs Clarke is not to be believed so soon as a woman of perfectly virtuous character. But then we must consider that whatever degree of turpitude we, on account of her way of life, attribute to her, must be shared by her keeper, by the person whose society she so long dwelt in. If we conclude that *her* mind has been vitiated, *her* morals destroyed by such a course of life, bare justice bids us also conclude that *his* mind and *his* morals must have undergone the same degree of ruin; and of course that whatever we, on this account, take from her credibility, we must, on the other hand, add to the probability of his doing that which is vicious."* An address to the Duke had been proposed in Parliament, expressing the disbelief of both Houses in his Royal Highness's connivance at the corrupt practices disclosed in the evidence; and in the debate on this proposal, Mr Perceval had intimated a hope that the Duke, warned by this exposure, would now reform, keeping in view the virtuous and exemplary conduct of his Majesty from the very commencement of his reign. "As there is a monstrous deal of cant in this," said Cobbett, "I wish to notice it somewhat particularly. This idea of a hope of reformation does, indeed, harmonise perfectly with all the talk of the Duke's being *imposed upon;* about his having fallen into the snares of an artful woman; about his being

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iii. p. 89.

infatuated by her; and about his being blinded by the excess of his passion for her. . . . Who that was unacquainted with the real state of the case, would not suppose Mrs Clarke to be another Millwood, and the Duke another Barnwell? Who would not suppose him to be a youth of seventeen or eighteen years of age? Who would suppose him to be nearly *forty-six* years of age, and to have been a married man for about *twenty* years? . . . I do not pretend to offer any opinion with respect to the general power and tendency of that *example*, upon the efficacy of which Mr Perceval seems to place so much reliance; but taking it for granted that the example is what Mr Perceval describes it to be, it can have escaped no one that *the Duke has had this example before him for the last forty-six years;* and whether it is likely that the example will now *begin* its operation upon him, is a question that I readily leave to the reader." *

The Government, it is believed, not caring to provoke further remarks from him on the Duke of York's case, left him undisturbed in regard to that matter, and watched for the first opportunity that he should afford them of bringing him to account for something else.

For such an opportunity they had not long to wait. In the Register for the 1st of July 1809, in speaking of the flogging of some privates of the Cambridgeshire militia, he inserted animadversions on the punishment of so severe a character that the attention of Sir Vicary Gibbs, the Attorney-General, was directed towards them. A portion of the local militia stationed

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iii. p. 169, 170.

at Ely had mutinied on account of some stoppage of their pay for knapsacks. The mutiny was suppressed by four squadrons of cavalry of the German Legion; and five of the ringleaders were sentenced by court-martial to receive five hundred lashes each. Part of this sentence was inflicted, and part remitted. "No Englishman," said Cobbett, in commenting on this account, "need contrast Buonaparte's mode of raising his soldiers with the English Government's treatment of ours; no man need cite the chains, and handcuffs, and bayonets, used in drawing out the French conscripts, to show how reluctantly the soldiers of France serve, in comparison with the willingness of ours. The discipline which is here exhibited must be admirably productive of a disposition in our troops to defend their country at the risk of their lives. Five hundred lashes each! Ay, that is right! flog them, flog them, flog them! . . . What! shall the rascals dare to mutiny, and that, too, when the German Legion is so near at hand? Lash them, lash them, lash them! . . . Base dogs! What! *mutiny* for the sake of the price of a knapsack! Lash them, flog them, lash them, base rascals! Mutiny for the price of a goatskin! and then, upon the appearance of the German soldiers, they take a flogging as quietly as so many trunks of trees." He concluded with hoping that the *loyal* people of England would henceforth be cautious of blaming the means employed by Napoleon to discipline his conscripts, when they see that our own "gallant defenders" not only at times require restraint, but "even a little blood drawn from their backs, and that, too, with the aid and assistance of the German troops." For these observations he was

brought to trial in the Court of King's Bench, before Lord Ellenborough.

The Attorney-General, after reading these remarks to the Court, said that Cobbett had charged the Government and the military authorities with cruelty, had suggested to the mutineers the injustice of their sentence, and had ridiculed the patience with which they submitted to their punishment. He had compared the mild and regular proceedings of British law to the arbitrary practices of a French tyrant. He had represented the German Legion, brave and honourable men—men who had sought shelter from despotism with us, and had shed their blood for our safety and glory—as fit for no other employment than that of assisting at the oppressive exercise of military vengeance. He had evidently intended to deter his countrymen from enlisting in that army which the circumstances of the time rendered necessary for the defence of their homes.

On the question of authorship, Cobbett admitted that he was the author of the libel, and the sole proprietor of the Register. But he was not now his own publisher; the publishers were Bagshaw and Budd, and the printer was Hansard. All these persons were indicted, but made no defence, suffering judgment to go by default. Cobbett acquitted them of all share in the alleged libel, saying that he himself had written it, but "without any evil or libellous intention."

Though Cobbett's remarks were published on the 1st of July 1809, the trial for the offence did not take place till the 15th of June 1810, Cobbett having availed himself of his residence in the country to delay the legal proceedings as long as possible, in the ex-

pectation, probably, that the feeling against him would be mitigated by time, and that the sentence upon him would be proportionably less severe. He employed no counsel, but defended himself, and spoke, it is said, for the first time in a court of law, with great force and effect. He attempted to exculpate himself from having delayed the trial, but without success; for it was clearly shown by Sir Vicary Gibbs that the delay had arisen on Cobbett's part. He endeavoured to show that he had written the observations for which he was prosecuted without any evil intention. He was accused of using the word "*loyal*," which was printed in italics in the Register, as a term of reproach; but he asserted that he had used it only ironically, in reference to men who claimed to be exclusively loyal, or pretended to an extraordinary degree of loyalty, but were in reality the greatest enemies of their king and country. His article, he acknowledged, "was satirical, hyperbolical, and perhaps clumsily and badly written—certainly written in a great hurry," but maintained that it was intended to reflect, not on his Majesty, but on his Ministers. When he said "flog them, base rascals!" was it to be supposed that he meant disloyalty, or was speaking seriously? And if a man thought a soldier ill treated, was he never to be allowed to speak a word in his defence? It had indeed moved his indignation that German troops should have been made to witness the punishment of his countrymen; and he had felt a dislike to the introduction of foreign troops into the country—a feeling which had always been entertained by true British subjects, as well in former times as in the present; but it could not reasonably be thought that the remarks

which he had made on the occurrence were designed to produce any ill effect on the country; for, he concluded, "my property, the profits of my publications, the very trees of my planting, all depend upon the security of the country, under the government of his Majesty and his successors; and I must be the greatest beast and fool, as well as knave and traitor, if I could seriously and deliberately intend the subversion of the Government, or to do any injury to the country."

Sir Vicary Gibbs, in his reply, observed that there was a part of the defendant's life when his publications justified the character of loyalty which he now assumed to himself, but that he must borrow from those publications, and not from the articles which he had lately sent into the world, to sustain that character. But he added that his satirical reflection on the mutineers for so tamely submitting to their punishment was sufficient to show the object of the publication for which he was under prosecution.

Lord Ellenborough, in addressing the jury, remarked that the intention of a publication must be judged from a fair consideration of the terms in which it was expressed; otherwise a person accused of libel would have only to say, "My mind was innocent, but my pen slipped; the libel was unguarded; acquit me." But the libel with which the defendant was charged consisted, not of one random expression, but of a continuity of the same thought, from the whole of which its purpose must be inferred. The jury would consider whether the words used in the publication were, or were not, those of a man wishing to dissolve the union of the military, on which the safety of the kingdom depended. For his

own part, he said, as the law required him, in cases like the present, to state his opinion to the jury, he had no hesitation in pronouncing this to be "a most infamous and seditious libel."

The trial lasted from nine o'clock in the morning till twelve at night; and the jury, without leaving their box, gave a verdict of guilty.

The judges, or the Government, took time to consider what sentence should be passed, for Cobbett was not brought again before the Court till the 9th of July, when it was adjudged that he should pay to the King a fine of £1000; that he should be imprisoned in Newgate for two years; and that, at the end of that time, he should enter into recognisances to keep the peace for seven years, himself in the sum of £3000, and two securities in the sum of £1000 each. Budd and Bagshaw were sentenced to two months' imprisonment, and Hansard to three.

Between the day of the trial and that on which the sentence was passed, Cobbett published in his Register an extensive comment, in defence or praise of himself, on the speech of the Attorney-General, apparently in the hope of lightening the punishment about to be inflicted on him. This comment, as far as it throws light on his life and character, it will be proper for us to notice. One allegation of the Attorney-General's, which caused him great annoyance, was, that he wrote the publication for which he was prosecuted, as he had written other things, *for base lucre.* It was, indeed, only the same charge, he said, that had been made before by the meanest of his calumniators, who were paid for reviling him, and not, like himself, by the

sale of their works. But if he had made gain by his writings, he had only done what Milton, and Pope, and Johnson, and other greater writers than himself, had done before him. Had he bargained for a sum of money to support certain principles, or to establish certain cases, without believing in the soundness of the principles or in the truth of the cases, he might fairly have been charged with seeking after *base lucre;* and, in truth, whatever remuneration was obtained from base motives, must be itself base; and there was "scarcely a lawyer who did not for base lucre sell his soul to the devil every hour of his life, except what he passed in sleep, which was the only time that the noxious creature could be said to be harmless." But "the charge of seeking after base lucre," he proceeded to assert, "is quite inapplicable to me. . . . I have now been, either in America or England, sole proprietor of a public print for upwards of fourteen years, with the intermission of about a year of that time, and I never did, upon any occasion whatever, take money or money's worth for the insertion or suppression of any paragraph or article whatever, though it is well known that this practice is as common as any other branch of the business belonging to newspapers in general. Many hundreds of pounds have been offered to me in this way, as my several clerks and agents can bear witness, and had I hankered after base lucre, the reader will readily believe that I should have received all that was so offered. . . . I lost many hundreds of pounds by my daily newspaper, which failed, not for want of readers, but solely because I would not take money in the same way that other proprietors did. . . . I have

acted up to my professions. I have at this time dependents on me for almost everything nearly *twenty children* besides my own. I walk on foot when others would ride in a coach, that I may have the means of yielding them support—that I may have the means of preventing every one belonging to me from seeking support from the public in any shape whatever. . . .

"In general, it is a topic of exultation that industry and talent are rewarded with the possession of wealth. . . . Upon what ground is it, then, that the *amassing of wealth*, the *making of a fortune*, by the use of industry and talents, is to be considered as meriting reproach in me? The *fact* is not true. I have not amassed wealth, and have not *made a fortune*, in any fair sense of those phrases. I do not possess a quarter part as much as I should in all probability have gained by the use of the same degree of industry and talent in trade or commerce. But if the fact were otherwise, and if I rode in a coach-and-four instead of keeping one pleasure-horse, and that one only because it is thought necessary to the health of my wife; if I had a fortune worthy of being so called, what right would any one have to reproach me with the possession of it? I have been labouring seventeen years since I quitted the army. I have never known what it was to enjoy any of that which the world calls pleasure. From a beginning with nothing I have acquired the means of making some little provision for a family of six children, the remains of thirteen. . . . And am I to be reproached as a lover of base lucre, because I began to have a prospect (for it is nothing more) of making such provision? Was it manly and brave for

the Attorney-General, when he knew that I should not be permitted to answer him, to make such an attack, not only upon me, but upon the future comfort of those who depend upon me for support? Verily this is not to be forgotten presently. As long as I and my children are able to remember, this will be borne in mind; and I have not the smallest doubt of seeing the day when Sir Vicary Gibbs, and those who belong to him, will not think of any such thing as reproaching us with the possession of our own earnings."

Another remark that wounded him made by the Attorney-General, or repeated from some public print, was, that he was "a person unworthy of notice." If he was unworthy of notice, he asked, why did his prosecutors take the trouble to notice him? But they knew very well that the public thought him worthy of much notice. His writings had gained the attention of the world solely by their own merits. As to his Register, not a pound was ever expended upon advertising it. It came up like a grain of mustard-seed, and like a grain of mustard-seed it had spread over the whole civilised world. "And why," he continues to ask, "has it spread more than other publications of the same kind? There have not been wanting imitations of it. There have been some dozens of them, I believe; same form, same type, same heads of matter, same title, all but the word expressing my name. How many efforts have been made to tempt the public away from me! Yet all have failed. The changeling has been discovered, and the wretched adventurers have then endeavoured to wreak their vengeance on me. They have sworn that I write badly; that I

publish nothing but trash; that I am both fool and knave. But still the readers hang on me. One would think, as Falstaff says, that I had given them love-powder. No; but I have given them as great a rarity, and something fully as attractive—namely, *truth in clear language*." That he had given clear language was certain; but that what was conveyed in the language was always truth, and nothing but truth, was maintained only by himself.

The third remark of the Attorney-General, against which he directs a vast force of refutation, is that the army, which he had libelled, called on the Court for justice against its traducer. He asserts that far from being a libeller of the army, he has always been a resolute pleader of the soldier's cause. "To the army," he writes, "to every soldier in it, I have a bond of attachment quite independent of any political reasonings or considerations. I have been a soldier myself, and for no small number of years, at that time of life when the feelings are most ardent, and when the strongest attachments are formed. Once a soldier, always a soldier, is a maxim the truth of which I need not insist on to any one who has served in the army for any length of time; and especially if the service he has seen has embraced those scenes and occasions where every man, first or last, from one cause or another, owes the preservation of his all, health and life not excepted, to the kindness, the generosity, the fellow-feeling of his comrades. . . . Of this military feeling I do not believe that any man ever possessed a greater portion than myself. I was eight years in the army, during which time I associated

less with people out of the army than any soldier I ever knew. This partiality I have always retained. I like soldiers as a class in life, better than any other description of men. Their conversation is more pleasing to me. They have generally seen more than other men; they have less of vulgar prejudices about them; to which may be added that, having felt hardships themselves, they know how to feel for others."

He then relates how he entertained a number of soldiers, when they were in want of quarters, at Botley. "Late in October, or early in November last, returning home in the dusk of the evening, I found our village full of soldiers. There were about *five hundred* men (a number nearly equal to the whole population of the parish) who had arrived from Portsmouth, last from Portugal; many of whom had been at the battle of Talavera, and had served in both the arduous and fatal campaigns in Spain; and most of whom had suffered either from sickness or from wounds actually received in battle. These men, who *had landed at Portsmouth that same morning, had marched eighteen miles to Botley,* where they found for their accommodation *one small inn and three public-houses.* All the beds in the whole village, and in the whole parish to its utmost limits, including the bed of every cottager, would not have lodged these men and their wives and children; and *all the victuals in the parish* would not, of course, have furnished them with a single meal, without taking from the meals of the people of the parish. The stables, barns, and every other place in which a man could lie down out of the way of actual

rain, were prepared with straw. Everybody in the village was ready to give up all his room to these people, whose every garment, limb, and feature, bespoke the misery they had undergone. It was rather unfortunate that both myself and my wife were from home when they arrived in the village, or I should have lodged a company of the privates at least. I found the greater part of them already gone to their straw lodging, and therefore I could do nothing for *them;* but I brought two of the officers (the commanding officer and another) to my house, not having spare beds for any more upon so short a notice. The next day, which happened to be a Sunday, the whole of the officers, thirteen or fourteen in number, lived at my house the whole of the day; and of all my whole life, during which I have spent but very few unpleasant days, I never spent so pleasant a day as that. . . . I never, upon any occasion, so much enjoyed, never so sensibly felt, the benefits of having been industrious and economical." It may well be suspected that there is in this account much of that exaggeration to which, especially in matters regarding himself, Cobbett was so extremely prone. That a body of five hundred men should have been made to take up their quarters for a night, and the whole of the following day and night, at a small village where it must have been known that no lodgings could be obtained, and no food unless it were furnished gratuitously by the inhabitants, is so much at variance with military regulations in general, that Mr Huish expresses strong doubts of much of Cobbett's story. To say that five hundred men, with wives and

children, should have been huddled into a village which could not on a sudden provide sustenance for fifty, is to require us to believe what is altogether inconsistent with probability. And if he expected that these statements would influence the Court of King's Bench or the Government to leniency, he was greatly deceived. But it may certainly be thought, when the matter, after this lapse of time, is calmly considered, that the punishment was more than proportionate to the offence; for that Cobbett, in writing the article for which he was prosecuted, had any intention to excite the army to mutiny, or any farther purpose than that of animadverting on the severity of the flogging, is scarcely credible. The declamation against the scourging of the soldiers seems to have been a lighter political offence than the publication of the reflections on Lord Chancellor Hardwicke. Indeed it may be thought that but for his strictures on the Duke of York's affair, he would not have been prosecuted for his remarks on the flogging at all.

The next number of the Register, published when he was lodged in Newgate, appeared without any political article from his own pen, but contained the following declaration: "Yesterday I had to appear in the Court of King's Bench, and now, for the first time in my life, on any account whatever, I am a prisoner, after having been a public writer for ten years in England, and *never having before been even called in question, never having before had even proceedings commenced against me in any shape, for anything written by me.*" By the words, "for anything

written by me," he intimated to the public that he was not the author of the remarks on Lord Hardwicke and Mr Plunkett. The words "never before" he evidently restricted to the period of his ten years' writing in England, but they would surely lead many of his readers to think also of the time when he attacked Dr Rush and the Spanish Minister in America.

CHAPTER IX.

Cobbett in prison—Declines a penny subscription to pay his fine—His other project for getting money—Expiration of his term of imprisonment—Accounts of his reception at Botley on his return—His liberation celebrated by a dinner at the Crown and Anchor—Charged with having made offers to Government before his imprisonment to discontinue the Register on condition of being pardoned — Declares the charge to be false, but does not satisfy his accusers—Reproached with duplicity — His letter to Alderman Wood on the education of the people—His affair with Lockhart at Winchester, and reports about it.

HE seems to have been at no loss for money when he was in Newgate. To rescue himself from a place among felons, he says, he had to pay twelve guineas a-week for the whole of the two years. He hired the best part of the jailer's house, and had almost constantly with him two of his children. His expenses for living were somewhat lightened by a weekly hamper of provisions sent up from Botley. But he maintained his wife for some time in lodgings in Skinner Street, where one of his children was born. The farming at Botley went on under some sort of deputy, and his eldest boy sent him for a time a journal of its proceedings. During a portion of his two years' imprisonment, however, he had his two eldest boys in town, and sent them to an abbé in Castle Street, Holborn, to be taught French.*

* Advice to Young Men, p. 286.

He was annoyed during his imprisonment by squibs and satire of various kinds; and "one villain," he says, "whose name was Gillray," caricatured him looking through the bars of his jail.

Some persons, to assist in his maintenance and the payment of his fine, proposed to raise a penny subscription for him; but Cobbett published an address in the Register, discountenancing the project; saying that he should be better and more agreeably served if his friends would purchase *the sets of the* Register *still remaining in his hands;* sets which, he said, would indeed be disposed of in a few years in the ordinary course of bookselling, but of which the immediate sale would be a great convenience to him, and afford him "ease of mind" by providing for the support of his family. But he offered them at twenty-five guineas and a half the set, a price which few or none were disposed to pay; and he had to lament that the penny subscription, which would doubtless have proved much more profitable, had been discouraged.*

On the whole, however, he expresses himself highly gratified by the regard shown him while he was in confinement. "During my imprisonment," he says, "the conduct of my friends was such as was naturally to be expected from men who regarded me as suffering in the public cause. The attentions of all sorts, the acts of real solid service, were as numerous and great, perhaps, as any man ever received in a like space of time. But the circumstance of this sort which gave me the most pleasure was, that during the two years I was visited by persons whom I had never seen before, from one

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 151.

hundred and ninety-seven cities and towns in England, Scotland, and Ireland, the greatest part of whom came to me as the deputies of some society, club, or circle of people, in their respective places of residence. I had the infinite satisfaction to learn from the gentlemen who thus visited me, that my writings had induced those who had read them to think. This fact, indeed, of being visited by persons from almost every considerable town in the kingdom, speaks a language that cannot be misunderstood."

When he was liberated, he published another account of the previous hardships to which he had been subjected by the severity of his sentence. He was doomed, he says, "to pay a thousand pounds to the King; ay, to the King," at the end of his term of imprisonment. "I have three sons," he adds, "and if any one of them ever forgets *this*, may he that instant be—not stricken dead, but, worse than that, bereft of his senses. *May he become both rotten and mad. May he, after having been a gabbling, slavering, half-idiot, all the prime of his life, become in his last days loathsome to the sight, and stinking in the nostril.*" This brutal allusion, as it has been justly termed, to the condition of George III., is one of the darkest stains on Cobbett's pages. He pretended to think, though he must have known very well to the contrary, that his fine passed into the royal purse. "The King," he said, "at the close of my imprisonment, was not in a condition to receive the thousand pounds, but his son punctually received it in his name and behalf, and *he keeps it still.*" *

He was received, he tells us, on his return into

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 155.

Hampshire, with a welcome that was no small consolation for the calumnies with which he had been assailed. He was met at Winchester by gentlemen who had come thirty miles to see him; and at Botley the young men drew him home in his carriage from the distance of more than a mile. How the villagers gathered round to cheer him he thus describes: "When we got into the village, about nine o'clock in the evening of the 11th of July, there was a sight for Sir Vicary Gibbs, and Lord Ellenborough and his brother judges, to see. The inhabitants of the village gathered round me; the young men and the boys, and their fathers and mothers, listened to my account of the CAUSE of my absence; hearing me speak of the *local militia* and the *German troops* at the town of Ely; hearing me call upon fathers and mothers to reflect on what I said, and on their sons to bear it in mind to the last hour of their lives. In short, the thing ended precisely as it ought to end, in a plain appeal to the understanding of a village; to young country men and boys, and their fathers and mothers.

"To express my feelings on this occasion is quite impossible. Suffice it to say that the good behaviour, the civility and kindness, of all the people of the village to my family during my absence, and their most affectionate reception of myself at my return, will never be effaced from my recollection. If there had wanted a motive in me to love my country, here would have been motive sufficient. That nation cannot be otherwise than good, where the inhabitants of a whole parish are so honest, so just, and so kind. For my part, born and bred amongst the farmers and labourers

of England, I have entertained towards them feelings of kindness; but I have now to add the feeling of gratitude, and of that feeling I shall, I hope, never fail to give proof, when it is in my power to defend any of my poorer neighbours against the oppressions of the more powerful."

A paragraph in the 'Times,' however, made his entrance into Botley appear of another character, which has generally been thought much nearer the truth. Some days previous to his return, a person whom he had employed as his agent during his absence, endeavoured to stir up the rustics by announcing that four half-hogsheads of ale would be given away when he came back. He procured two clarionets and a drum to join a procession, and induced the landlord of the chief public-house to display the flag of a benefit-club from his window. He endeavoured to get the bells of the church rung, but the rector of the parish, supported by a number of loyal individuals, refused to oblige him with the keys of the belfry. Nor did the young men of the village, when asked to draw the carriage for a mile, prove quite so tractable as the agent desired. They complained of the heat and dust, and offered excuses, but the agent prevailed with them by declaring that if they refused to draw the carriage they should not drink of the ale. This argument induced them to take on themselves, for the occasion, the character of beasts, and some of the rector's party said that they did not know which had more of the beast—those who dragged or he who was dragged. The procession was composed of persons of the lowest character, the more respectable mechanics and labourers

keeping aloof from it. Cobbett made a speech; the agent and his followers, athirst for the ale, shouted; the ale was placed at their disposal, and the affair concluded with a riot which lasted till Sunday morning, to which the constables were compelled to put an end.

I thought it well to give these accounts of his return to Botley before noticing the dinner to which he was invited, on his exit from prison, by the party of Sir Francis Burdett, who took the chair on the occasion, at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, on the 9th of July 1812. Six hundred persons are said to have been present, but, like the villagers of Botley, not all favourable to Mr Cobbett. At the tavern-door, as the guests entered, handbills were delivered to them, referring them to a letter in the 'Times,' signed, "A Fellow-Sufferer from unjust Persecution," in which various charges were made against Cobbett's political conduct and general dealings with his supporters and the public. It was there shown how he had formerly censured and ridiculed Sir Francis Burdett whom he was now praising and flattering; and how he had contradicted himself on other subjects. It was said that, after having made a large sum of money by his Register, and being in possession of ample means to pay his fine, he had sought to elicit unnecessary contributions from his readers and supporters, by declining their friendly subscription as not sufficiently promising, and endeavouring to force on them the purchase of surplus copies of that publication by the sale of which he had already so largely profited. It was also charged upon him that, at the time of his last trial, between the day of his conviction and that of pronouncing the judgment, he

had made an offer to the Government to discontinue his Register, on condition that he should be pardoned; and that it was only because this offer had no effect that he continued to publish the Register.

When his health was drunk as "an able advocate of Parliamentary Reform, and zealous opposer of the flogging system," Cobbett had to make a speech. He dwelt at much length on what he had suffered from the prosecution. His change of tone with regard to Sir Francis Burdett he justified on many grounds which he had discovered for altering his opinions respecting that honourable baronet and the principles which he advocated. As to discontinuing the Register, he had contemplated doing so, he said, because he was afraid of being unable to write with the freedom which he had previously exercised, and was unwilling to address the public in a lower strain.

But there was a party in the room whom these observations did not satisfy. One of the company, who did not give his name at first, but afterwards said it was Collier, remarked that Cobbett had made no specific answer to the two principal charges against him; first, that he "had unworthily and indirectly attempted to raise a sum of money from the public, to defray the expenses of his trial, when the public had already enabled him fully to sustain them;" and, secondly, that he "had offered to discontinue his Register for the purpose of inducing the Court of King's Bench to mitigate the sentence about to be passed upon him." His object was, he said, to ascertain from Mr Cobbett, by his direct contradiction of these accusations, that he still continued true to the cause of the people.

Cobbett replied that it was unfair to charge him with endeavouring to procure money by unworthy means merely because he had, when living at an extraordinary expense, offered his own property for sale; and that, as to discontinuing the Register he had never made any such proposition to the Government as that which was imputed to him, nor had ever received any such proposition from the Government; nor had he ever had a thought of ceasing to write on any such condition as that which had been mentioned. This declaration was followed by a great uproar, some applauding Cobbett, and some decrying him; and it is certain that a large portion of the company still remained unconvinced by his protestations.

The truth is that his censors had got hold of a copy of an address "To the Readers of the Register," which he had actually written and printed for insertion in it, at the time of his conviction, stating that the number in which it would appear would be the last. The motives there intimated for the discontinuance of the Register were such as he alleged in his speech at the dinner; but the authors of the handbills circulated against him declared that he did not write the address till "he erroneously thought that he *had made his peace* with Ministers."* They, and many others, continued to reproach him with using unmanly arts under the disguise of patriotism; with desiring that his readers should be his dupes; and with being ready to desert for gain that cause which for gain only he had advocated. These imputations were reiterated in the

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 164; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 78.

'Times' by the same writer or writers that produced the handbill; but Cobbett made at that time no farther attempts to repel them. The subject will come before us again at a later period of Cobbett's life.

For the next four or five years there is nothing in the life of Cobbett calling for much notice. In 1813 he addressed a letter to Mr Alderman Wood, a promoter of education on the Lancasterian plan, questioning whether the teaching of poor children to read was likely to be productive of good. To benefit mankind by enabling them to read, he said, it was necessary to insure the reading of books which would convey truth to the mind; for it was possible for a person to become by reading more ignorant than he was before; since if a child, for instance, having no notion of the origin of coal, were made to believe, in consequence of something that he read, that coals were made of clay, he would be more ignorant than he was before reading, as falsehood is farther from truth than the absence of knowledge. A child at Loretto, uninfected by the lies of the ecclesiastics, would know nothing of the origin of the Virgin Mary's house there; but, if he read what the priests affirmed respecting it, he would believe that it flew thither from Palestine, and thus would be more ignorant than if he had never read anything about it.

If a poor man be taught to read pretty well, he will probably desire to read such newspapers as his means will procure. But out of the three or four hundred newspapers published in the kingdom, mostly "vehicles of darkness rather than light," were there twenty, asked Cobbett, that told plain truth? and, granting that there were twenty, there would be at least twenty chances to

one against truth coming to the reader's mind. But if it were expected that a labourer would read what are called good books, to improve his mind, in such portions of leisure as he might have, the expectation would assuredly be futile; for in the evenings, after a hard day's work, he would be too tired to fix his thoughts on anything but his supper and his bed; and on Sundays, when he was not at church, if to church he went, he would have enough to do in attending to his children and his household matters, even if his mind were sufficiently prepared for fixing itself on other subjects of thought. His toil of six days would make him glad to have the seventh, as far as possible, for a day of rest. Of Cobbett's opinion on this subject we have had time to see the justice. The poorer class have read little of what is good; and that they have been morally improved, or have become better members of society, by the reading of penny newspapers, is evidently not the case. They have grown, on the contrary, more turbulent and factious, more ambitious of fancied rights, and less respectful to persons above them; they have rendered it more difficult for the Government to rule them, and more difficult for those who wish them well to do them good.

In March 1817 Cobbett was present at a public meeting which had been convened at Winchester by the sheriff, for the purpose of presenting an address to the Prince Regent, on account of the outrageous attack made upon him as he returned from opening the session of Parliament. The word "constitution" being used in the address, Cobbett proposed that there should be added to it the words "as established by Magna Charta,

the Bill of Rights, and the Act of *Habeas Corpus*, for which our forefathers fought and bled." Lockhart, afterwards editor of the 'Quarterly Review,' who was present, stood forward and said that if the meeting adopted Mr Cobbett's proposition, they would declare against loyalty and encourage sedition. Cobbett retorted in defence of his amendment, and observed that whatever might be the differences of feeling or opinion in the gentlemen present, they must all be perfectly unanimous in thinking that Mr Lockhart had been "guilty of the *foulest misrepresentation* that was ever made by mortal man." Such language Lockhart could not hear without resenting it; and in the evening, after the meeting broke up, he called on Cobbett at his inn accompanied by two gentlemen. What occurred then and afterwards we have to learn from Cobbett himself, who says that he would not suffer the visitors even to sit down, but told Mr Lockhart that all communication between them must be in writing. Lockhart went away and wrote a note, stating that his object in calling on him was that he might retract the word "foul." Cobbett replied that he had not said "foul," but "foulest," and should retract nothing till Lockhart should express his sorrow for having allowed his tongue to go beyond the cool dictates of his mind. Lockhart's answer was, that he must insist on the satisfaction of a gentleman, for which he requested Cobbett to make immediate arrangements. Cobbett's rejoinder was this:—

"WINCHESTER, *March* 11, 1817.

"SIR,—If I could stay here another day, I would amuse myself with some fun with you, but, having

business of more importance on hand, I must request of you to renew your pleasant correspondence on our arrival in town. In the meanwhile, I remain your most obedient and most humble servant,

"WM. COBBETT."

Nothing further seems to have ensued. Cobbett was a cock that only crowed. He had written something *against duelling*, but whether this was known to Lockhart is uncertain. Of giving what is called the satisfaction of a gentleman, as well as of much else that was gentlemanly, he had no notion. A paragraph appeared, a few days afterwards, in the 'Morning Post,' stating that Cobbett had been horsewhipped by Lockhart at Peckham. The account of what was said to have occurred was given with such circumstantiality as to invest it with the full semblance of truth. It was related that the "hectoring bully" Cobbett had in one instance at least met with his deserts; that Mr Lockhart, hearing that Cobbett had passed Sunday night at Mr Timothy Brown's at Peckham, had set out thither on Monday morning to find him; that he met Cobbett returning to town near "The Bricklayers' Arms," and "applied a tremendous horse-whip to the broad and well-adapted shoulders of his antagonist;" and that Cobbett took refuge in the shop of an apothecary named Jones, from which he emerged with evidence that "his sconce had suffered considerable damage," and with "an enormous plaster over his left eye." Cobbett decried this statement in his Register of March 20th as a malicious fiction, saying that he slept on the Sunday night at No. 8 Catherine

Street, Strand; that he remained in that house on the Monday; and that he had not seen Lockhart since he left Winchester. The story seems to have been one of those inventions which political adversaries have at all times been but too ready to publish about one another.

CHAPTER X.

Cobbett's return to America—His alleged reasons for leaving England—Other reasons—His pecuniary circumstances—His debts—Fixes his residence in Long Island, near New York—Fearon's visit to him there—Cobbett offended at Fearon's account of it—Publishes 'A Year's Residence in America'—Continues to supply papers for his Register—His "Gridiron Prophecy"—His house and farm-stock burnt—Applies in vain to the Pennsylvanian Government for compensation for his sufferings in the matter of Rush—His Radical letter to three prisoners for sedition—Thinks of returning to England—His notions about the payment of his debts given in a circular letter to his creditors—Sir Francis Burdett's letter to him in reply.

AT that time he was hastily preparing for another visit to America. He and his friends gave out that he was fleeing from his country because he was afraid of oppression from the Government; of having his mouth stopped, and being thrown into a dungeon. So much disaffection towards the Government had spread through the country that, from fear of insurrectionary movements, the *Habeas Corpus* Act was suspended on the 4th of March; and about the same time other laws were passed, afterwards known by the name of the "Six Acts," against blasphemous and seditious libels; against seditious meetings; against training in arms; for legalising the seizure of arms; for imposing a duty on newspapers; and for punishing certain misdemeanours. Cobbett wished it to be understood that he himself was the offender against whom the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* Act, and much of the matter in the

other bills, was chiefly directed. He kept his intended departure so secret that he had actually engaged at the time to support Hunt at a meeting at Devizes, and Hunt, while he was waiting for him, learned from a newspaper that he had embarked.

Let us hear what reasons he himself gives for his flight. No hope was left him, he says, of being able to assist in restoring the rights and liberties of his country. "The laws which have just been passed," he proceeds, "forbid us to entertain the idea that it would be possible to write on political subjects according to the dictates of truth and reason, without drawing down upon our heads certain and swift destruction. It was well observed by Mr Brougham, in a late debate, that every writer who opposes the present measures, 'must now feel that he sits down to write with a halter about his neck;' an observation the justice of which must be obvious to all the world. . . . I have reasoned thus with myself. What is now left to be done? We have urged our claims with so much truth, we have established them so clearly on the ground of both law and reason, that there is no answer to us to be found other than that of a suspension of our personal safety. If I still write in support of those claims, I must be blind not to see that a dungeon is my doom. If I write at all, and do not write in support of those claims, I not only degrade myself, but I do a great injury to the rights of the nation by appearing to abandon them. If I remain here, I must therefore cease to write, either from compulsion, or from a sense of duty to my countrymen; therefore it is impossible to do any good to the cause of my country by remaining in it: but if I

remove to a country where I can write with perfect freedom, it is not only possible, but very probable, that I shall, sooner or later, be able to render that cause important and lasting services.

"Upon this conclusion it is that I have made my determination; for, though life would be scarcely worth preserving, with the consciousness that I walked about my fields, or slept in my bed, merely at the mercy of a Secretary of State; though, under such circumstances, neither the song of the birds in spring, nor the well-strawed homestead in winter, could make me forget that I and my rising family were slaves; still there is something so powerful in the thought of country, and neighbourhood, and home, and friends—there is something so strong in the numerous and united ties with which these and endless other objects fasten the mind to a long-inhabited spot—that to tear one's self away nearly approaches to the separating of the soul from the body. But then, on the other hand, I asked myself, 'What! shall I submit in silence? Shall I be as dumb as one of my horses? Shall the indignation which burns within me be quenched? Shall I make no effort to preserve even the chance of assisting to better the lot of my unhappy country? Shall that mind which has communicated its light and warmth to millions of other minds, now be extinguished for ever? and shall those who, with thousands of pens at their command, still saw the tide of opinion rolling more and more heavily against them, now be for ever secure from that pen by the efforts of which they feared being overwhelmed? Shall truth never again be uttered? Shall her voice never again be heard, even from a distant shore?'"

The paper containing these words, published in the Register at the time of his departure, was dictated, say his sons, in a very short time, on the evening of the 21st of March 1817, at No. 8 Catherine Street, where the Register was then published. At five o'clock on the following morning he left London, accompanied by his two eldest sons, William and John, and embarked with them on the 27th, at Liverpool, for New York, which they reached on the 5th of May.

It is unpleasant to find that this statement, so plausibly set forth, does not contain the full or even the true reasons for his escape to America. There was another the strongest of all, to which he makes no allusion. Hitherto the reader may have seen cause to conceive of him as a thriving and prosperous man. He had made money in America, and, notwithstanding his losses through his libel on Rush, he had brought home sufficient to start him, as it seemed, in a fair way of business in London. He had been receiving, some time before his departure, a profit of fifteen hundred a-year, as he tells us, from his Register alone;* and he was "turning," as the mercantile expression is, twenty thousand a-year by his various publications.† He had saved enough, as early as 1806, to get into his hands the estate at Botley, of the value of forty thousand pounds; and he seems to have lived there as a farmer, comfortably but not extravagantly. He was therefore considered, by a large portion of the public, to be in excellent pecuniary circumstances. But he had no sooner embarked on the Atlantic than it became known to everybody that he was deeply sunk in debt. The

* Register, July 1817; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 213, 228.

† Ibid. v. 201.

great cause of his encumbrances appears to have been reckless ventures in printing and publishing. He seems to have set no bounds to his bookselling and pamphleteering speculations. At the time that he started the Register he entered also on three other publications, a 'Parliamentary History,' 'Parliamentary Debates,' and 'State Trials,'* works which, though they soon passed into other hands, would cost him something to start them. He was making endeavours, too, to establish a branch of his business in America, and had sent off a nephew to New York in 1815 to fix himself there for that purpose.† Thus his expenditure of money had gone far beyond what his business supplied. He had borrowed, to keep himself up; he had mortgaged the Botley property; and he had run into debt with the tradesmen with whom he was connected. Part of his debts we find copied from "an authentic list" of them furnished to a writer in the 'Quarterly Review':‡

Mr Tunno, mortgagee of the Botley estates,	£16,000
Sir Francis Burdett,	4,000
Mr R——,	4,000
Messrs Tipper & Fry, stationers,	3,500
T. B——n,	2,000
Mr L——r,	1,300
Executors of Mr B——e,	900
Mr P——s,	450
Mr W——e,	500
Messrs H. T. & M——x, printers,	500
Mr S——n, printer,	100
Sundry poor shopkeepers and others at Botley,	400
	£33,650

* Remarks on the Speech of Sir Vicary Gibbs, Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 121.

† Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 215.

‡ Vol. xxi. p. 136.

The total amount is said to have been more than £36,000. He had therefore other reasons for leaving England besides fearof the suspension of the Act of *Habeas Corpus*. "Had he stayed at Liverpool another tide," says the writer in the Quarterly, "he would have been brought back, and consigned to Newgate or the King's Bench."* But he persisted to the end of his life in reiterating, not only in the pages of his Register, but in all his other writings, that Sidmouth and Castlereagh were the real causes of his flight to America.†

He fixed his residence in Long Island; an island one hundred and thirty miles in length, lying off the coast of New York, to which State it belongs. Here he took a small farm called Hyde Park Farm. What we know of his mode of living there, from any other source than his own pages, is chiefly gained from a book called 'Sketches of America,' published in 1818 by Henry Bradshaw Fearon, a person sent out as an agent by thirteen English families who wished to emigrate to America, to ascertain in what part of that country it would be most desirable for them to settle. As he approached Cobbett's residence, he found "fences in ruin, the gate broken down," and "a house mouldering to decay." He ventured to call upon Cobbett without any introduction, and was shown by his servant into a room in which Cobbett was writing with his coat off. After asking him whether he was an American, whether he was "acquainted with the friends of liberty in Lon-

* See also Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 250.

† Rural Rides, p. 63, 145, 171, 172; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works,' vol. v. p. 206, 207.

don," and what were his objects in visiting America, Cobbett entered into familiar conversation with him. "I was pleasingly disappointed," he says, "with the general tone of his manners. . . . Mr Cobbett thinks meanly of the American people, but spoke highly of the economy of their Government. He does not advise persons in respectable circumstances to emigrate, even in the present state of England. In his opinion, a man who can but barely live upon his property will more consult his happiness by not removing to the United States. He almost laughs at Mr Birkbeck's settling in the western country. This being the first time I had seen this well-known character, I viewed him with no ordinary degree of interest. A print by Bartolozzi, executed in 1801, conveys a correct outline of his person. His eyes are small, and pleasingly good-natured." "To his servants," he adds, "he was easy—but to all, in his tone and manners, resolute and determined. He feels no hesitation in praising himself, and evidently believes that he is eventually destined to be the Atlas of the British nation. His faculty of relating anecdotes is amusing.

"My impressions of Mr Cobbett are that those who know him would like him, *if they can be content to submit unconditionally to his dictation. Obey me, and I will treat you kindly; if you do not, I will trample on you,* seemed visible in every word and feature."

He took Fearon round his grounds, and complained to him of the difficulty of obtaining labourers at reasonable wages. He could not get his hay mown unless he gave half the produce to the mower, who thought even that a hard bargain. Fearon came away from

him, he says, "with pleasing sensations," and with "obligation to him for a reception generous and liberal."

When Fearon's book was published, Cobbett, indignant at the unfavourable description given in it of his farm, and the freedom with which the author had spoken of him, wrote an abusive retort upon it in his Register.* He affected to despise Fearon as a mean man, and loaded him with coarse and opprobrious epithets which there was no proof that he deserved. But as to the truth of the statements of the two writers, there can be no question, remarks the reviewer of Fearon's book in the Quarterly, on which side the right lies. "We think Mr Fearon incapable of advancing an untruth; whereas falsehood is known to be the essential part of his antagonist's character."

He wrote a journal of the time which he spent in Long Island, and published it under the title of 'A Year's Residence in the United States of America,' combining with it, in the same volume, a copious essay on the culture of the "Ruta Baga," or Swedish turnip. He lauds himself greatly for having taken with him, on his second voyage to America, ten pounds of Swedish turnip-seed, which introduced that vegetable into the New World. Much of the journal is occupied with entries about the state of the weather and trifling matters; but with these he could not forbear to mix observations on political affairs. At times he travelled about to gain agricultural and other information; and he continued to annoy the Ministry in England by an

* See Appendix to Cobbett's Journal of a Year's Residence in America.

uninterrupted supply of papers for his Register. But there was this inconvenience about the papers sent from America, that they arrived too late; the news of occurrences in England was several days in reaching him, and more than twice that time elapsed before his remarks on them could be laid before the English public, so that his dissertations fell among his readers like shot fired after a battle is decided.

It was from Long Island that he despatched to this country what was afterwards called his "Gridiron Prophecy." It was contained in a letter to Lord Folkestone, written in September 1819, in which he descanted on the measures of Sir Robert Peel regarding the Bank of England, and especially on the baronet's intimation that the Bank would be enabled, in 1823, without any reduction of the debt, to pay in coin. She will not do so, said Cobbett, or, if she does, "I will give my poor body up to be broiled on one of Castlereagh's widest-ribbed gridirons." This prediction he several times repeated in his Register, amplifying it, in one passage, into "I will give Castlereagh leave to lay me on a gridiron, and broil me alive, while Sidmouth may stir the coals, and Canning stand by and laugh at my groans." Hence arose the decoration of the gridiron which Cobbett subsequently placed at the head of his Register.* As the Bank continued to pay in coin, as far as demands were made upon it, Cobbett was thought to have deserved the broiling.

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 436; Rural Rides, p. 52, and note (27); Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 372.

How long he contemplated staying in America does not appear; but he had spoken, ever since his departure from England, of his intention to return at some time. He was constantly expressing his notion that he was to promote the restoration of English freedom and happiness. "England is my country," he said in his journal, "and to England I shall return." But his return appears to have been hastened by a fire, which, on the 20th of May 1818, broke out in his dwelling-house, and reduced it in a few hours to a heap of ashes, together with a great part of his corn, hay, and farm-stock. This calamity seems to have thrown him into great straits, and his American prospects were overclouded by it. "It threw me out for a month," he says. "I should have gone to New York, and remained there till the time of my departure for England; but when I considered the interruptions which such a removal would occasion, and when I thought of the injury that these and the air of a city might be to my literary labours, I resolved on making a sort of *thatched tent*, in which I might enjoy tranquillity, and in which I might labour without intermission." Here he went on, farming and writing—sometimes praising the Americans, and sometimes finding fault with them—till the summer of 1819. He memorialised the Pennsylvanian Government for compensation for what he had suffered in the matter of Rush, but without effect; though Mr Ambrose Spencer, Chief-Justice of the State of New York, gave his opinion that there was illegality in the proceedings of which Cobbett complained, and that compensation ought to be made.*

* Rural Rides, p. 170, note (96).

In June of that year he addressed a letter, in his Register, to Johnson, Baguley, and Drummond, three fellows who, for treasonable utterances, had been sentenced, like himself, to imprisonment for two years. In this production he shows how thorough a Radical he had become. He exhorts them to bear up under the infliction laid upon them by the borough-mongering tyrants. He intimates, in accordance with his 'Paper against Gold,' that the nation's best hope was in the insolvency of the Government despots. For himself, he enjoys the sight of "that ruffian band" writhing under the blows which he began to inflict on them a few months after he was in his prison. "I have been dealing them blows," he says, "from that day to this. All my plans in private life, all my pursuits, all my designs, wishes, and thoughts, have this one great object in view, *the overthrow of the ruffian borough-mongers.* If I write grammars; if I write on agriculture; if I sow, plant, or deal in seeds; whatever I do, has *first* in view the destruction of those infamous tyrants. . . . You see what embarrassment the villains are now in. You see how they are puzzled to invent new lies, in order to hide the fact of their irrevocable insolvency. They are *at their wits' end.* And a satisfaction it is to me to reflect that it is I who have, more than all other men put together, brought them into this state!" He counsels the three "gentlemen" to improve the period of their confinement by devoting it to study, and, above all things, to study grammar, as he himself had done when he was a soldier. "Now is the time," he exclaims, "for you to become *grammarians.* In your place I should reason thus: 'How

shall I be able most effectually to annoy the tyrants? By my pen, combined with my other means. How shall I qualify myself to use my pen with effect? By knowing how to write correctly. How shall I get the knowledge? *By learning grammar.* Therefore I will learn grammar.'" Such were the ignorant wretches that set up to reform the nation; wretches who, when they were cooped up for their folly, required to be told to learn grammar!

How he contrived to arrange with his creditors, so as to be enabled to return to England without being thrown into jail, we have no satisfactory information. Wright, who conducted the publication of the Register,' probably settled some conditions for him. But what notion he himself had of the duty of satisfying his creditors, under pressure of the political circumstances by which he pretended to be compelled to leave England, is fully shown in a letter which he wrote to Mr Tipper, the printer, from Long Island, November 20, 1817, and which he intended to be sent as a circular to all who had claims on him:—

"I hold it to be perfectly just," he says, "that I should never, in any way whatever, give up one single farthing of my future earnings to the payment of any debt in England. My reason," he adds, "is, that the Six Acts were despotic ordinances intended for the sole purpose of taking from me the real and certain, and increasing means of paying off any debt and mortgage in two years. . . .

"When the society is too weak," he continues, "or unwilling, to defend the property, whether mental or of a more ordinary and vulgar species, of any individual,

and where there is not the will or the power in the society to yield him protection, he becomes clearly absolved of all his engagements of every sort to that society, because in every bargain, of every kind, it is understood that both the parties are to continue to enjoy the protection of the laws of property.

"But from the great desire which I have, not only to return to my native country, but also to prevent the infamous Acts levelled against me from injuring those persons with whom I have pecuniary engagements, and some of whom have become my creditors from feelings of friendship and a desire to serve me, I eagerly waive all claim to this principle, and I shall neglect no means within my power fully to pay and satisfy every demand, as far as that can be done consistently with that duty which calls on me to take care that my family have the means of fairly exerting their industry, and of leading the sort of life to which they have a just claim." He then proposes to clear off great part of his debts by the publication of the '*Maitre Anglais*,' republished under the title of 'The English Master,' and of 'The French Master,' a grammar to teach French to English persons.

Speaking of his qualifications for writing such works, he says he taught his son William "to write French at twelve years old better than nine-tenths of the Frenchmen that I have ever known, or at least that I have ever seen write," and "both John and he speak now French as well as the greater part of Frenchmen." These works he expects to prove a source of real and substantial profit. He is also getting ready a Grammar of the English Language, in the form of "letters addressed to his beloved son James." This

Grammar he expects to produce profit for many years. And he adds: "Whatever part of this profit can, without endangering the wellbeing of my beloved and exemplary, affectionate and virtuous family, be allotted to the discharge of my debts and encumbrances, shall with scrupulous fidelity be so allotted; but as to this particular object, and as to other sources of gain, I will first take care that the acts of tyrannical confiscation which have been put in force against me, shall not deprive this family of the means, not only of comfortable existence, but that it shall not deprive this family of the means of seeking fair and honourable distinction in the world. It is impossible for me to say, or guess at, what I may, with my constant bodily health, and with the aptitude and industry which are now become a part of me, be able to do in the way of literary works productive of gain; but I can with safety declare that, beyond the purposes of safety to my family, I will retain or expend nothing until no man shall say of me that I owe him a farthing."

As to the profits of the Register he is in doubt, but will settle something about the matter in a short time. But if there is any man who insists that he ought to pay under the circumstances in which he is placed, and will "meet him before the world in written charge," he will "pledge himself," he declares, "to cover him with so much shame and infamy as the world can be brought to deign to bestow upon so contemptible a being."

This letter, designed for all the creditors, came of course into the hands of Sir Francis Burdett, who had assisted Cobbett in his difficulties with the loan of

£4000. Sir Francis at once wrote the following reply, dated January 31, 1818:—

"It is not my intention to enter into any controversy respecting the honesty or dishonesty of paying or not paying debts according to the convenience of the party owing. It seems that if it should ever suit your convenience, and take nothing from the comforts and enjoyments of yourself and family, such comforts and enjoyments, and means, too, of distinguishing themselves as you think they are entitled to—all this being previously secured—then you think yourself bound to pay your debts;—if, on the contrary, that cannot be effected without sacrifices on your and their part, in that case your creditors have no claim to prefer, and you no duty to perform. You then stand absolved, *rectus in foro conscientiæ*, and for this singular reason, because those who lent you their money when you were in difficulty and distress, in order to save you and your family from ruin, were and are unable to protect you either against your own fears or the power of an arbitrary Government, under which they have the misfortune to live, and to which they are equally exposed. These principles, which are laughable in theory, are detestable in practice. That you should not only entertain and act upon, but openly avow them, and blind your own understanding, or think to blind that of others, by such flimsy pretences, is one more melancholy proof of the facility with which self-interest can assume the mask of hypocrisy, and, by means of the weakest sophistry, overpower the strongest understanding. How true is our common-law maxim, that no man

is an upright judge in his own cause! how truly and prettily said by the French, *La nature se pipe*—nor less truly, though more grossly, in English, 'Nature's her own bawd'!

"In expressing my abhorrence of the principles which you lay down for your conduct, and concerning which you challenge my opinion, a little unfairly, considering the ridicule with which you at the same time threaten to overwhelm the unfortunate wight who presumes to differ from them, I do not desire that you should act upon any other with regard to me; I should be sorry your family were put to any inconvenience on my account; should your circumstances ever prove so prosperous as to enable you to discharge your debts without infringing upon those new principles of moral obligation you have adopted, and which for the first time since the commencement of the world have, I believe, been, though frequently acted upon, openly promulgated. As to complaint or reproach, they are the offspring of weakness and folly—disdain should stifle them; but nothing can or ought to stifle the expression of disgust every honest mind must feel at the want of integrity in the principles you proclaim, and of feeling and generosity in the sentiments you express.—I am, sir, your most obedient and humble servant,

"F. BURDETT."

These letters were published by Richard Carlile, January 4. 1819.

CHAPTER XI.

Resolves to bring Tom Paine's bones to England—His abuse and eulogies of Paine—Is refused a passage in a vessel belonging to the Wrights—Reasons for the refusal—His correspondence with Cropper on the subject—Arrives at Liverpool—Shows Paine's bones—Ill received at Manchester and Coventry—Cobbett and Hunt—Cobbett arrested—Paine's relics an unsuccessful speculation—Cobbett sinks in public opinion—He is repulsed by Sir Francis Burdett—Asserts that the money which Sir Francis had lent him was a gift—Pecuniary embarrassments—Attempts to raise supplies under the name of a Reform Fund.

WHEN he began to think of returning to England, the Act for the Repeal of the *Habeas Corpus* Act had been repealed; but that circumstance, though he affected to make it a reason for venturing back, had in reality nothing to do with his movements. When he determined on returning, however, he determined also to bring with him the bones of Thomas Paine, as a precious gift to his country, in which, for the honour of the land that gave Paine birth, they ought to be deposited. Nothing can show how readily, how shamelessly, Cobbett adopted or affected opinions, or asserted doctrines, at one time, utterly at variance with those which he had advocated at another, than the different modes in which he spoke and acted with regard to Paine. He had abused him, in 1796 and subsequently, as "an atrocious, infamous miscreant," who could not blush because "the rust of villany had eaten his cheek to

the bone." He was "the flatterer and slave of Carnot," and "made for a French republican." He was "the wretch Paine," a "ragamuffin deist," whose "religion was exactly of a piece with his politics—one inculcating the right of revolting against government, and the other the right of revolting against God." He had "fled from the thief-catchers in England," said Cobbett, to America, and from thence, "finding himself universally despised," he had hastened to "take his seat among the thieves of Paris." He was "a fiend," deserving of all the damnatory epithets that thought could conceive or language supply.

He now called him "a man of rare mental endowments;" "the only great man" ever produced among the Quakers; "the scourge of tyrants, under whatever name they disguised their tyranny;" and whereas people had called him "a spy," and said that "he merited death upon the gallows," "heaven," said Cobbett, "is not farther from hell" than he from deserving such condemnation. He was so honest and sincere that "he, of all men, could never flatter in his life." "As the champion of popular power, in opposition to the abuses of a monarchical government, Paine," said Cobbett, "will always stand pre-eminent in the world."*

Paine, when he died, had expressed a desire to be buried in the Quakers' burying-ground at New York; but the Quakers refused to comply with his wish, on the ground that they were accused by many of deism already, and did not wish to give further occasion for

* Register, 1816, 1819; Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. i. p. 162; vol. ii. p. 270.

the charge. He was in consequence buried in the corner of a field, which he seems to have rented. After a while, some persons who were interested about the ground applied for leave to remove the bones into the burying-ground of one of the chapels at New York; but the chapel-wardens would only allow them to be put in an obscure corner where strangers were buried. Cobbett came to the rescue, and proceeded to promote to honour those precious relics which had thus been kept back from honour.

When he applied for a passage to Liverpool on board the Amity, a vessel belonging to Isaac Wright and Sons, Quakers, he was refused, and told that he should have no passage in any ship of theirs; the reason given for the refusal being that he had conducted himself insolently and offensively during his last voyage to New York on board the Importer, a ship owned by the same firm. This repulse gave rise to some letters on the subject between Cobbett and James Cropper, a merchant of Liverpool, who had first begun to correspond with Cobbett on the slave-trade. At length they proceeded to abuse one another, and it was stated in one of Cropper's letters that the refusal of the Wrights resulted from a declaration of several persons, who intended to go by their vessel, that they would not sail in the same ship with Cobbett, in consequence of what they had heard of his behaviour on board the Importer. This statement called forth from Cobbett an account of what he had said and done, in his dealings with the captain and the passengers, on board that vessel; and from his own narrative it appears, though he endeavours to justify himself on all points, that his

conduct and language must have been in no small degree presumptuous, overbearing, and coarse. It is not worth while to enter into his detail of the dispute between himself and the captain. Certain it is that he was refused a passage by the Wrights, and had to return in the Hercules, a vessel belonging to another company. Mr Huish thinks that there were other reasons for the refusal in addition to those alleged, but that Cobbett himself carefully kept them in the background.

It is hardly possible to dismiss this subject without noticing one of those egregious bursts of self-praise which Cobbett took occasion from it to utter. "If any one should be disposed to ask," says he, "How comes it that a man so directly the opposite of all that is selfish, ungenerous, and unfeeling; so kind, so indulgent, so tender towards all that come under his power, down to the lowest of animals; so forbearing as to lose thousands upon thousands without ever having brought an action in the whole of his life; so completely destitute of insolent pride, so affable and obliging; in his very nature so happy, so good-humoured, and gay;—if any person should ask how it comes to pass that such a man should, by so many of 'the race that write,' be held up as a hard, morose, violent, ill-tempered, unfeeling ruffian? let that person find the answer in the remark, which I quote from memory, of the Dean of St Patrick: 'The dunces are lenient enough towards each other; but if a man of real talent happen to make his appearance, they are all instantly up in arms, and as they cannot pull him down to their own level in any other way, they will endeavour to murder and blast his character.'"

He arrived at Liverpool on the 20th of November 1819, after an absence from England of two years and five months. He was met, on landing, by some readers of his Register, who regarded him as a political authority. Among them was Egerton Smith, the editor of the 'Liverpool Mercury,' whom he afterwards turned against, and abused under the name of "Bott Smith," on account of something that he had said about the bott disease in horses. A crowd attended him to the custom-house, to which his luggage had been conveyed for inspection. When the officers proceeded to open the last package, they found something wrapped in woollen. Cobbett stepped forward, and said, "These are the mortal remains of the immortal Thomas Paine." The crowd pressed round to look into the receptacle. "Great indeed must that man have been," said Cobbett, in his account of the affair, "whose very bones attracted such attention." The officers very readily passed the package back into Cobbett's possession.

Remaining in Liverpool for a few days, he consented, at the request of several persons calling themselves reformers, to address a meeting there, at which he spoke chiefly on two subjects—the bones of Tom Paine, and the condition of the House of Commons. He was heard with a mixture of applause and hissing, and there was much strife of parties. He then received addresses from Manchester, and some other towns in Lancashire. In the evening he was entertained at a dinner, at which the guests drank "The memory of our famous countryman, Thomas Paine, *the noble of nature, the child of the lower orders,* illustrious from his unrivalled talents, and still more illustrious from the

employment of those talents." He gave as a reason for his former abuse of Paine his want of maturity of judgment, and inexperience in pecuniary affairs, when he first began to write; but he was now resolved to atone for his former injustice "by exhibiting the bones of Paine to as many as might choose to see them," and by using every possible means to procure the erection of a colossal statue to his memory.

Though the reformers of Manchester had paid their respects to Cobbett, the authorities of that borough sent him a message that it would be well for him not to enter that place with any display, or to do anything that would be likely to cause a breach of the peace; a caution to which they were moved by the recollection of what had occurred at Peterloo in the preceding August, where Hunt had collected a multitude which the yeoman-cavalry were required to disperse. Cobbett was at first fired with indignation, and proposed to set the Manchester magistrates at defiance; but, on reflection, resolved to yield, and drove off to Coventry. There he entered an inn, but the landlord, a sound Tory, when he discovered who was his guest, desired him to leave the premises, and hoisted a placard over his door, stating that "The bones of Cobbett and Paine had been ordered to quit the house."

When Cobbett arrived in London, Hunt and his party resolved to celebrate his return by a dinner at the Crown and Anchor, which accordingly took place on the 3d of December, the persons assembled amounting to more than four hundred. The presidency of Hunt, who took the chair, was rendered somewhat ridiculous by the circulation of an extract from one of

Cobbett's Registers, in which Cobbett had cautioned his readers against Hunt as a man of bad character. "There is one Hunt," said the extract, "a Bristol man; beware of him. He rides about the country with the wife of another man, having deserted his own. He is a sad fellow; have nothing to do with him." But this malicious hit, strange to say, did not prevent Hunt from proposing Cobbett's health, who, returning thanks, descanted on the necessity of Parliamentary Reform, and the virtues of Thomas Paine, who had opened Cobbett's eyes to the evils of the funded system. The memory of Thomas Paine was then drunk, as that of "the ennobled friend of human nature," and "the greatest enlightener of the human mind." A Mr Wooler paid Cobbett an equivocal compliment, saying that he would have the statues of Paine and Cobbett placed side by side, as they were "worthy of each other in the eyes of the country."

As the guests began to separate, and as Cobbett was leaving the tavern, he was arrested for a debt contracted before his retirement to America, but was bailed by Hunt, and by Mr Dolby, who was now become the publisher of the Register.

Opinions freely expressed about Paine's bones gave him to understand that his importation of those noble relics, as he termed them, had done him much harm. The more serious spoke of the proceeding with disgust, and the less reflecting with derision. Much ridicule was thrown on the transaction by a report that Cobbett had brought away, by mistake, the bones of an old negro. He was caricatured as a bone-gatherer, carrying a large bag, with the label, "Will. Cobbett, with

Tom Paine's bones, to make knife-handles. N.B.—Bad spec." Cobbett, however, persisted in thrusting the dirty relics on the notice of all who bought his Register. He desired, he said, to render the remains some signal marks of honour. But his call elicited no reply. He attempted to get up a dinner on Paine's birthday; but the demand for tickets was small, and no landlord could be found to lend his house for the purpose. He then suggested a magnificent funeral, to be celebrated in the spring, when twenty waggon-loads of flowers could be procured to strew the way. He also proposed that, for defraying these expenses, and erecting a monument, locks of Paine's hair should be distributed among his admirers at a guinea a lock; and when it was remarked that, if the demand for these locks should be great, the supply must soon fail, Cobbett unblushingly replied, that he had an ample store, which should be done up in gold rings, in the presence of himself or some one deputed by him, each person who took a lock paying, in addition to the guinea, for the gold and the workmanship. He even declared that, should the applicants amount to twenty thousand, he had a stock quite sufficient to satisfy them! But the whole of the public, reformers and anti-reformers, deists and anti-deists, recoiled with disgust from the proffered contact with the hair said to be Paine's. The thing was universally scouted as a shameless hoax; for it was proved that Paine, at the time of his death, was almost bald; and it was inferred that Cobbett's supplies for twenty thousand rings must have been found in the sweepings of hair-dressers' shops. Not a single ring was made or demanded.

What became of the precious skeleton is unknown, for Cobbett, after his scheme failed, never made another allusion to it.

No enemy of Cobbett could have wished to sink him lower, in the estimation of the better class, than he sunk himself by this project about Paine's bones. His name ceased to be mentioned with any degree of respect. No Secretary of State, no leader even of the Opposition, was now disposed to invite him to his table. Nothing but his power and attractions as a writer could have kept him from falling, not only into contempt, but into utter neglect. He was sensible of the error of which he had been guilty, and did what he could to repair it. He disclaimed all approbation of Paine's deism; he valued him, he said, only for his political teachings; and declared, on one occasion, that he had never read his theological writings. By degrees the public grew tired of the subject; and his energy in the prosecution of his Register, the pungent satire of which delighted many that disliked its doctrines, enabled him to bear up against all the torrent of censure that was directed upon him.

Those who stood forward to welcome him, on his return from America, attempted to bring about a reconciliation between him and Sir Francis Burdett, with whom, since he had borrowed his money, and refused, as we have seen, to pay him, as well as the rest of his creditors, he had been constantly at strife. He had also bitterly abused the baronet in various articles of his Register sent over from Long Island. Long before, in 1805, when Cobbett turned against Pitt, he had begun to eulogise and advocate the principles of

Sir Francis, and had exerted all his personal influence, and all his power of writing, to promote his election for Westminster. A friendship between them seems to have succeeded; for Sir Francis, himself sincere in his politics, regarded Cobbett as an honest advocate of the principles which he so zealously professed. During his imprisonment he received many proofs of the baronet's goodwill; and, when he was released, Sir Francis took the chair at the dinner given to him, and spoke highly in his praise. But during their intimacy, Sir Francis, to relieve Cobbett from some pecuniary pressure, had assisted him, as we have seen, with the sum of £4000; and it was about this money that the grand disruption of their friendship took place. Cobbett asserted that the money had been a free gift; Sir Francis spoke of it as a loan, and, as he had received bonds for it from Cobbett,* the truth was indisputably on his side. Cobbett never made an attempt to repay a farthing of it; and this was one of the reasons for which his enemies were ever after reproaching him with want of honour in his pecuniary dealings. Cobbett, apparently on the *odisse quem læseris* principle, proceeded to reproach Sir Francis, when once a difference had arisen between them, with the utmost acrimony; laughed at the title which had been given him, of "Westminster's pride and England's glory;" and continued to ridicule him under the name of "Old Sir Glory" to the day of his death.

When a reconciliation between them was contemplated, one of Cobbett's friends waited on Sir Francis to

* Letter of Sir F. Burdett; Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 302.

ascertain how he was disposed towards his antagonist. The baronet was inexorably hostile. "Mr Cobbett," said he, "must remember the allegations which he has made against me in his Register, and must know whether they are true or false. If they are true, no honest man would wish to renew intercourse with me; and if they are false, what is to be thought of the person who uttered such charges, knowing their groundlessness?"

According to Cobbett, however, no reconciliation was to take place, except on a very extraordinary condition, which Cobbett himself required. These are Cobbett's own words: "I would have nothing in the shape of cooperation with him, except as one of a public meeting, perhaps, *unless he would immediately, and out of his own purse, furnish the means of facilitating, as soon as the occasion should offer, the entrance of Mr Hunt and myself into the House of Commons.*" This condition he gave in writing to the person who waited on Sir Francis, but that person, finding the baronet set against Cobbett, as related above, brought the paper away without showing it to Sir Francis.* Cobbett gave as a reason for joining Hunt with himself in the proposal, that, in reading Sir Francis's "Letter to the Electors of Westminster," on the affair at Peterloo, he had thought he perceived in it indications of the baronet's goodwill towards Hunt; and he thought also, he said, that a man who had abundance of money, like Sir Francis, might use it in a good cause for the aid of those who were poorer than himself. But Cobbett must have seen that Sir Francis could not use his money in get-

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 303-307.

ting him and Hunt into Parliament, except by purchasing seats of some of those boroughmongers whom he was holding up to detestation; for he must have been well aware that there was at the time no borough in England which would, without external influence, have elected either Hunt or himself. The matter did as little credit to Cobbett's sense as to Cobbett's honesty.

Let us conclude what is to be said on this subject by looking a little further forward into Cobbett's life. After he became, in consequence of the Reform Bill, a member of Parliament in 1833, the charge of having borrowed from Sir Francis Burdett and refused to pay him was revived in the public prints, and was urged against him with such pertinacity in the pages of the 'Morning Chronicle,' that he felt obliged to say something in his defence in his Register. Let us hear what sort of defence he there made. Having spoken of the "affair of Burdett," as he calls it, he says, "Let it be a loan, which it was not; but let it be a loan. I owed it him then; and the story is that I, owing it him, wrote to him from America to say that I would not pay him. Now the senselessness of this lie, one would think, would cause it to be universally disbelieved. I was attacking him at the time; I was accusing him distinctly of having abandoned the reformers in the months of February and March 1817; I was laying it upon him with a heavy hand. I was telling him that I would bring him down, though it might cost me about ten years to do it; and, at this time, I was writing to him and acknowledging the debt, and telling him that I would never pay him.

This is a thing not to be believed of a sane person. I was in Long Island, to be sure, but a power of attorney and a writ would have stripped me of everything I possessed in that country, down to the very bed that I lay in. But as if this were not daring enough, I came to England in a year and a half after I had told him that I never would pay him. And I came to London, too, at about the end of that year and a half. What! come across the sea on purpose to put myself within his reach after having stirred up his animosity, and declared that I never would pay him! The fact is, that I knew what he said in his anger he never would swear, and therefore I was sure that he never would commence a suit against me for the money. Very soon, however, after my arrival, he had an opportunity of swearing, if he chose, for I became a bankrupt, of which he was duly informed, of course. To prove his debt, he must swear to the debt; but though invited to do so by Mr Brown, he never did it; and the truth is, he never would have said a word about the matter, had it not been for his anger at the attacks which I had made upon him.

"But did I, then, never tell him that I would not pay him? Verbally, this is impossible, because he and I were intimate until the month of February 1817, and we have never spoken together from that time to this. Was it in writing? Then he has the letter, and can produce it." Cobbett then proceeds to say that from Long Island, in the spring of 1818, when he was suffering from the loss of his property, he wrote,—but let us give his statement in his own words: "I wrote a circular letter to all those to whom I owed

money in England, amongst whom I included the baronet. I had been driven away from what was then become really an enormous income. Sidmouth and Castlereagh's Powers of Imprisonment Bill had been passed; my choice lay between flight and a dungeon; the laws of personal liberty were abrogated as far as related to me." This is mere assertion, for Cobbett was as much at liberty personally as any other man, unless he chose to violate the law. However, "In writing the above circular letter," he proceeds, "I made observations of this sort: 'That the laws of civil society made it incumbent on men to pay the debts which they had contracted in that society; but that, if a partial tyranny arose, depriving a portion of the society of the power of pursuing the calling which they had pursued while the debt was contracted; and if the society, as a whole, was either unwilling or unable to abate such tyranny, then that society had no right to demand the payment of debts due from those who had been prescribed by the tyranny, any more than you have a right to demand of a man the performance of a foot-race which he has contracted to perform, you having first given your assent to the cutting off of one of his legs.' But after having stated this doctrine, I expressly told him in the same letter" [how could this be told to Sir Francis individually in a letter addressed to the body of the creditors? It might have been added to the letter, but it could not have been told in it] "that, in his case, I would waive every such right of refusal, but that, as soon as I was able, I would satisfy his claim to the last penny; and

that no exertion on my part should be wanting for the purpose of effecting that object." * What he adds, however, brings to nought all his protestations of striving to repay Sir Francis. "At last came the bankruptcy, and then the creditor was paid, at any rate as far as the law could pay him. As I said before, he never came to prove his debt, and I was sure he never would; and *I owe him nothing now, unless he have some peculiar privilege to set aside the effects even of a bankruptcy.*"

Thus he turns Sir Francis's generous forbearance, in declining to press his claim, into a proof that he had no claim; or, if it must be granted that he had a claim, he exults, like a fraudulent debtor, in having the advantage of an act of bankruptcy. Certain it is that his denial of obligation, after withholding all payment, convicted him of ingratitude, and enabled his enemies to decry him as "a worshipper of Mammon under the mask of the patriot." Instead of bringing Sir Francis down in ten years, he saw Sir Francis standing high above him, and looking down upon him from his eminence to the end of his life.

The career of Cobbett now becomes every year less and less interesting. In his early days we have seen him struggling, under the greatest difficulties, to educate himself, and pursuing a course of conduct which, on his discharge from the army, procured him testimonials of the highest value. During his course as a political writer in America also, he had expressed himself in favour of monarchical government, of the Estab-

* Register, October 1833.

lished Church, and of all that tended to preserve order in his country. Now we behold him falling daily lower and lower in the estimation of all the better order of society. We find him proved to be insincere in his dealings with other men; to be a professor of one thing while he was a doer of the contrary; to be a reviler, from bad motives, of those whom he had formerly commended; and to be absolutely dishonest in pecuniary transactions.

He returned to England to experience the same state of embarrassment under which he had left it. He seems to have taken no prudent means to free himself from his encumbrances. Undeterred by his former ill success in attempting a daily newspaper, he now commenced another, called 'Cobbett's Evening Post,' which, as he had no capital to keep it going, failed in two months. He had nothing but the profit from his Register to recover him from bankruptcy. Certain actions for defamation, also, were waiting to sink him deeper into difficulties; but these did not come on for some months.

He was so reduced at the time that he was declared bankrupt, that he had not even a farthing to divide among his creditors. Tipper, the paper merchant, to whom he owed more than three thousand pounds, was good enough to sign his certificate. Timothy Brown, one of his great supporters, gave him a pound-note and a few shillings, that he might have, for form's sake, something to surrender to the commissioners. When, after some settlement of his affairs, he managed to collect his family together in lodgings at Brompton, they found themselves in possession of only three shillings, and

under the necessity of borrowing money for printing the next number of the Register. *

He now proposed to raise a fund for himself, in a mode something similar to that in which he had attempted to make profit by Paine's hair. The fund was to be, as he represented, for "furthering the cause of Reform, in a way such as his discretion should point out." The sum requisite, in order to forward the object effectually, would be five thousand pounds, which might be "collected among male and female reformers, and lodged in his hands, to be used solely by him, and *without any one ever having a right to ask him what he was going to do with it.*" Twopence each from six hundred thousand men and women would produce this sum; and abstinence from a little snuff, or a pint of beer, would enable each to contribute. But, he adds, "though I have mentioned the sum of twopence, there are doubtless persons of ability who will be ready to subscribe larger sums, and I have reason to believe there are some gentlemen who will be ready to do this in a very liberal manner indeed. Such persons may not wish to lodge their subscriptions with a third party; and they will of course communicate directly with myself; and I shall acknowledge the receipt of every sum so received by letter directed to the person received from. Persons living in small towns or villages may, without any display of subscription, make up a pound or two, which can be forwarded, as before mentioned, direct to myself." But this scheme yielded him no profit. His readers were uncharitable enough

* Address to his Political Friends, Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 403.

to believe that, under pretence of serving the cause of Reform, he was endeavouring to get five thousand pounds for his own purse. Altogether, the project had no other effect than that of giving him a farther impulse downwards.

Some of his ill-wishers, pretending to be people of Richmond, took occasion, from his bold professions, to play off an egregious hoax upon him, by sending him an inflated address, full of the most ridiculous flattery, pretending to be from "The Female Reformers of Richmond to the Guardian Angel of Reform." It congratulated him on having returned to his country in health and strength to pursue the blessed work of its reformation, and was accompanied with "a piece of plate" in the form of a teapot, which the donors called "a humble gift," but "wished that it was surrounded with gold and jewels." Cobbett was delighted, and returned a most gracious answer, saying that he would come to the Talbot Inn on a certain day to offer them his thanks in person. How a man of his understanding could have allowed his vanity to be so duped by the language of the address was amazing; but somebody or something prompted him to examine the teapot, which was found to be brass, with a very slight silver coating. Cobbett was disgusted and dumfounded. The 'Courier' made merry with his disappointment, and Cobbett ineffectually endeavoured to make it appear that he had turned the hoax on the hoaxers, by making an assignation to meet them at the Talbot Inn, which assignation, after the discovery of the value of the teapot, he took care not to keep.

CHAPTER XII.

Cobbett still eager to enter Parliament—Endeavours to raise a subscription for the purpose—Stands for Coventry and is defeated—Actions brought against him by Cleary and Wright—His pecuniary connections with Wright—Concerning his offer to the Government to discontinue his Register—Result of the legal proceedings against him—His character suffers by them—He takes the part of Queen Caroline—Writes a letter for her to the King—Professes to believe her guiltless—Publishes his 'Paper against Gold,' and 'Cottage Economy,' and commences his 'Rural Rides'—Receives a medal from the Society of Arts—His travelling lectures—Dinner to him at Farnham—'Letter to the Boroughmongers,' and other political papers.

In the early part of 1820, on the dissolution of the Parliament at the death of the King, Cobbett made another attempt to effect an entrance into the House of Commons; an object which his ill success at Honiton had not been able to drive from his thoughts. He prepared to offer himself for the representation of Coventry, by publishing in his Register his claims as a political writer to a seat in the legislature, and calling on the reformers not only to support him with their voices, but also to subscribe a sum of money to defray the expenses of his election. This appeal was not without success; for one of his admirers subscribed five hundred pounds, and several others smaller sums. He accordingly put forth an address to the electors of Coventry, and meetings were held, under the presidency of Hunt, to promote his cause. But, as he calculated

that the cost of the proceedings would not be less than two thousand pounds, and as the whole of that sum was not raised, he sent out a circular letter to gentlemen of fortune, requesting seventy of them to subscribe each ten pounds more, that his seat might be thus secured. "As far as the press can go," he says, in one of his appeals, "I want no assistance. Aided by my sons, I have already made the ferocious cowards of the London press sink into silence. But there is a large range, a more advantageous ground to stand on, and that is the House of Commons. If I were there, the ferocious cowards of the press would be compelled, through their three hundred mouths, to tell the nation all that I should say—how much I should do; and it is easy to imagine what I should say—how much I should do. A great effect on the public mind I have already produced; but what should I produce in only the next session, if I were in the House of Commons! Yet there I cannot be without your assistance. The *Fund for Reform* I shall for the present direct to this more pressing object."

When he made his appearance at Coventry, he did not find the people so favourable to him as he had hoped. At Daventry bridge he was met by a number of the opposite party, doubtless a hired band, who told him that if he did not retreat they would throw him into the water. But from this difficulty he was rescued at length by a superior force of his own party. At the hustings at Coventry, however, the mass of his opponents prevailed. Cobbett, in his description of the election, calls them "savages," "yelling beasts," hired by "rich ruffians" at a thousand pounds a-day.

They were "man brutes," much less decent in their behaviour than dogs, and less reasonable than the sow which ascertained the direction of the wind before she put her young to bed. He would have been wretched, he says, if he could have thought himself of the same nature with them, or have considered them as fellow-creatures with himself, except as all created things are fellow-creatures. With all due allowance for exaggeration on the part of Cobbett in his resentment, we must suppose that the conduct of the men of Coventry on this occasion was outrageous and disgraceful; and as to their wives and daughters, calling themselves ladies, they disgusted him by staying to listen to language from which decent women of any grade would have shrunk away. For a while he lost his voice, partly from his endeavours to bawl to the screaming multitude, and partly from the effect of a cold. He made desperate efforts, during four days, to obtain votes, but the result was that he polled only five hundred and seventeen, and that his opponents, Ellice and Moore, were elected by a majority of nearly a thousand.

The actions against him for libel, of which we have spoken, were delayed till the end of the year. One of them was brought by a Mr Cleary, a friend of Major Cartwright, a Radical gentleman who was pursuing his studies for the bar. At an election for Westminster, at which Hunt was a candidate, he had taken a prominent part in opposition to Hunt; and having got possession of a letter of Cobbett's to Mr James Wright, in which Cobbett, who was then in America, had spoken unfavourably of Hunt, he read it on the hust-

ings to the assembled crowd. Cobbett, learning the use that had been made of his letter, declared, in his Register of September 5, 1818, that it was a forgery, and that Cleary had been concerned in forging it. For this statement Cleary commenced an action against Cobbett in the Court of King's Bench, on the 3d of December 1820, laying his damages at three thousand pounds. Brougham was counsel for Cleary; Cobbett defended himself. Mr Justice Abbott was the judge. Wright and others proved the genuineness of the letter. Cobbett exclaimed against the betrayal of private correspondence; and the jury, moved by his representations on this head, made the damages only forty shillings.

The next action against Cobbett was brought by the Mr James Wright to whom Cobbett had written the letter on which the preceding action was brought, and who had been for several years Cobbett's partner and assistant, their connection having began when Cobbett became a bookseller in Pall Mall. Wright, indeed, had been a conductor of the great speculations put forth under Cobbett's name, the 'Parliamentary History,' and the 'Parliamentary Debates,' and had been his representative in arranging the matter of the Register. While Cobbett was thus connected with Wright, it is worthy of remark that, though he was then striving to write down the national paper system, he carried on his own publications by the help of accommodation paper to the amount of sixty or seventy thousand pounds, which paper Wright was employed to negotiate, giving one bill as another became due, basing one transaction on another, and remitting cash from time to time to Cobbett at Botley, during his residence there. But by

degrees, from long protraction of settlement, the boundary between what was Cobbett's and what was Wright's became indistinguishable, and the accounts grew so intricate that, as Cobbett told a third person, who proposed to become a partner in the business, "the devil himself could not unravel them." At length, however, on Cobbett's going to prison, some division of the property became necessary; but Cobbett disputed all Wright's demands; and in consequence an accountant was consulted, who reduced a claim of Cobbett's from twelve thousand pounds to six. Out of these contentions arose a mortal enmity between Cobbett and Wright. The alleged libels, for which Wright now brought his action, were contained in certain paragraphs of the Register, published in January 4, 1817, March 9, 1819, and January 6, 1820, one of which, in particular, branded Wright as "a wretch without an equal in the annals of infamy, not excepting the renowned Jonathan Wild;" a wretch whom Cobbett, when he had time, would "drag forth, and hold up to the horror of mankind."* Wright, though he had been in pecuniary difficulties, was, according to Mr Scarlett, who pleaded his cause, a man of good character, to whom no one except Cobbett had ever imputed falsehood or fraud.

Cobbett had attacked Wright because he supposed that he had furnished to the 'Times' the information that Cobbett had made an offer to the Government, in June 1810, to discontinue the Register, if he were not called up for judgment for his reflections on the flogging of the soldiers at Ely. We have seen that

* Register, Jan. 1817; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 82.

Cobbett boldly denied this charge at the dinner given to him on his liberation in 1812. The charge was, however, repeated, two days afterwards, in a letter to the 'Times;' but Cobbett then, as we have stated, forbore to notice it. But in November 1816 the 'Times' renewed the accusation, and Cobbett printed another denial in his Register in the following January. "*The charge,*" he wrote, "*is basely false. No proposition of any sort was ever made by me, or by my authority, to the Government.*" He then proceeds to say that, on going back to Botley after his conviction, before he was brought up for judgment, he was so moved by the tears of his wife and family that he did write a letter to his attorney, desiring him to make that proposition; but the letter was hardly posted when their spirits revived, indignation took the place of fear, and, as the letter could not be recalled, they despatched Mr Finnerty, who was then at Botley, to London, during the night, to prevent the letter from being acted upon in the morning.* And it was at the conclusion of this statement that the libel on Wright, charging him with infamous conduct, appeared.

Wright was, of course, solicitous to justify himself; and by his account it was shown that Cobbett's plea —the statement about the letter from Botley—was, if true, utterly nugatory; for before he left London for Botley, on the 23d of June, he had written to another person, Mr John Reeves of the Alien Office, on the 20th of June, giving him full power to treat with the Government for the discontinuance of the Register,

* Register, January 1817; Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. v. p. 78.

on condition of a pardon being granted. Reeves communicated Cobbett's proposition to the Government through Mr Yorke, then First Lord of the Admiralty. Wright heard of this proposition on the 21st, and begged Cobbett not to persist in a proceeding so fatal to his interest and reputation; but Cobbett was unyielding. He sent up to Mr Reeves from Botley a statement of his claims to indulgence, to be laid before the Government, and a copy of a farewell address to the public on laying down the Register. Reeves's letter, acknowledging the receipt of the statement of claims, was produced by Wright, as well as Cobbett's letter speaking of the transmission. On the 27th Wright waited on Reeves; and finding that Yorke's answer gave Cobbett no hopes of success, implored him again, in a letter to Botley, not to sacrifice character and fortune on the slight chance that appeared of his punishment being remitted. Perceval, indeed, had treated Cobbett's offer with scorn. Cobbett then, convinced that there was no hope of pardon, altered his course; wrote to Wright to suppress the farewell address, which had been put in type, and to allow the Register to proceed. All this was proved on oath by Mr Reeves and others; and Cobbett made the case against himself worse by meanly attempting to throw the blame of publishing the libel of the 4th of January, 1817, on his two sons, mere boys, to whom he had left, he said, the conduct of that number of the Register.

The jury considered the libels on Wright deserving of the penalty of a thousand pounds damages and forty shillings costs.* The great damage done to Cobbett by

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol. ii. p. 312-321.

that trial was the exposure to the public of the utter falsehood of his denials in his speech at the Crown and Anchor, and in his printed declarations, of having made an offer to the Government to discontinue his Register. So disgusted were the reformers at his insincerity, that, at a numerous meeting of them some short time afterwards, the Register was burnt.

He might have given up his Register and incurred but little blame, for he was quite at liberty to discontinue it if he pleased; he was bound by no obligations to any party; he was free to take any course that he might consider most to his advantage; and if he had withdrawn the overflowings of his mind from one channel, he might have directed them into another. But what disgraced himself, and offended his supporters, was his reiterated denial of that which was clearly proved against him.

During the proceedings of George IV. and his Ministry against Queen Caroline, commenced in 1820, Cobbett took a decided part, as was to be expected, against the Government. He declared himself one of the Queen's most devoted adherents, and, when she landed at Dover, went out as far as Shooter's Hill to meet her on her way to London, and boasted of having waved a branch of laurel over her head. The characters of the members of the "Milan Commission" he decried and depreciated, saying that Mr Cooke's readiness to take on him such an office was quite sufficient to give a notion of his worth; that Mr Powell's change of politics showed his fitness for a dishonest undertaking; and that Colonel Brown, who, as an officer in the army, knew his preferment or degradation to be dependent

on the service which he should do his employers, must be sensible that to be a spy on another man's wife, and to hunt for witnesses against her, were occupations little suited to the character of a soldier. He also wrote the letter, which made a great noise at the time, from the Queen to the King, asserting her innocence, and begging that she might have a fair trial, on which her judges should not be her jury. This letter, which fills six closely-printed octavo pages, was produced by Cobbett's fertility in a night, and, being copied by his daughter Anne in the morning, was the same day put into the hands of Alderman Wood, and by him transmitted to the Queen, who was so delighted with it that she signed her name to it just as it stood, in Anne Cobbett's handwriting, and despatched it at once to the King at Windsor. From the neglect of some point of etiquette in the mode of sending it, it was not received, but in a few days afterwards it was published in the 'Times,' whence it was copied into all the other papers, and posted in broadsheets over all London. The Queen's cause was ably argued in it, in a forcible and lucid style, and, as long as it was unknown who was the author, it was attributed by the several periodicals of the day to several writers of eminence, but by most to Dr Parr, who was thought by some to have been assisted by Dr Reynolds. It retained such favour in the eyes of the Queen that, when her portrait was painted for the city of London, she desired to be represented with it in her hand.*

It may here be noticed also that, in 1813, at the time of the Delicate Investigation, before the Queen, then

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. vi. p. 32.

Princess of Wales, went on her travels, Cobbett wrote several articles in his Register, maintaining her innocence, and striving to refute her accusers. He acknowledged that for a long time he had thought her "guilty to a considerable extent;" that the very appointment of a commission to inquire into her conduct was sufficient to give him an evil impression respecting her; and that, though she was acquitted on all capital points, he still considered her an immoral woman. But when he had examined the evidence concerning her, he exclaimed, "There is not a creature to be found in any rank of life who does not regard her as the most calumniated of women, and who does not hold her base assailants in detestation."*

In 1821, Cobbett was very busy in publishing. He reprinted his essays on the 'Paper System,' written from 1803 to 1806, and put forth the collection in a volume entitled 'Paper against Gold,' a book of which our previous remarks about his notions on finance will sufficiently indicate the object. He next gave the public his 'Cottage Economy,' containing directions about brewing and baking, and other household matters; a book intended, he says, to prevent the misery brought upon labouring families by the pot-house and the tea-kettle. Into this work he thrusts, as is his wont, abundance of political disquisition and declamation.

In the same year he began to publish his 'Sermons,' which he extended to the number of twelve, and commenced the publication of his 'Rural Rides'—accounts of his excursions through various counties of England

* Selections from Cobbett's Political Works, vol. iv. p. 237, 249.

to deliver lectures in the principal towns and villages in dissemination of the doctrines which he chose to maintain about boroughmongering and place-hunting. What led him to the adoption of this course of lecturing, besides the money to be got by it, he himself states thus: "That combination, that sort of *instinctive* union, which has existed for so many years, amongst all the parties, to *keep me down* generally, and particularly, as the county club called it, *to keep me out of Parliament at any rate*—this combination has led to the present haranguing system, which, in some sort, supplies the place of a seat in Parliament."* His manner of lecturing he also describes: "Though I never attempt to put forth that sort of stuff which the *intense* people on the other side of St George's Channel call "eloquence," I bring out strings of very interesting facts. I use pretty powerful arguments;" but "it would be useless for me," he adds, "to attempt to give anything like a report of these speeches of mine, consisting of words uttered pretty nearly as fast as I can utter them, during a space of never less than two, and sometimes of nearly three hours."† He continued to lecture every year, and to publish his Rides, for more than ten years.

In the year 1821, also, he received the silver medal of the Society of Arts for the introduction, through the medium of his son James, whom he had left at New York, of a valuable kind of grass for making straw-bonnets, from America into England.

He had now become so eminent in the eyes of the people of Farnham that, in the month of May 1822, a party of the residents in the town and neighbourhood

* Rural Rides, p. 126. † Ibid., p. 161.

invited him to a dinner. In the course of his speech on the occasion, he remarked that, for the last thirty years, he had been almost wholly unacquainted with any one in those parts except his near relations. He then spoke of the buffeting that he had endured from the political corruption which he had struggled to overthrow, and of his efforts in the cause of Reform. He reiterated his belief that the great object of the corrupt faction in power had been to keep him down, and that their decision on proposed measures had frequently turned on the question, "Would the adoption or rejection *tend to fulfil the prophecies of Cobbett?*" That day he pronounced to be the happiest of his life, "though few men," said he, "perhaps ever spent so many happy days as myself."

In August 1822, the suicide of Lord Castlereagh gave occasion to Cobbett to bestow a kick on a dead lion. He wrote a satirical 'Letter to the Boroughmongers,' commencing, "Let me express to you my satisfaction that Castlereagh has cut his throat;" and, in a letter to Joseph Swann, who was sent to Chester jail for selling seditious pamphlets, he says, "Castlereagh has cut his throat and is dead. Let that sound reach you in the depths of your dungeon, and let it carry consolation to your suffering soul." The causes of his lordship's death, in Cobbett's opinion, were emptyheadedness and insanity. Of the real cause he had no knowledge.

Various other papers, some of considerable mark, appeared in the Register during this and the four following years. The promotion of Canning provoked his wrath, and stimulated him to write a series of

letters under the title of "Mr Canning at school." A scheme for paying off the national debt, by devoting part of the property of every landholder to the object, incited him to address a sharp remonstrance to Mr Ricardo, who had approved the project. Malthus's anti-population doctrines he assailed with severe animadversion; and the Earl of Ripon, then Mr Robinson, was satirised for his financial proposals and promises, under the name of "Prosperity Fred."

CHAPTER XIII.

Offers himself a candidate for Preston—Hunt prosecutes him for libel—His schemes for raising money—Bronze medal of him—Is unsuccessful at Preston—His boastfulness and self-conceit ridiculed by the press—His astonishing reconciliation with Hunt—His outrageous behaviour at a dinner at the Crown and Anchor—Is once more bankrupt—Offers himself as common-councilman for a ward in the city—Unsuccessfully petitions the Government for a remission of his fine—Makes another attempt to get money by a subscription—Is prosecuted on the charge of endeavouring to excite discontent among the labouring classes—His defence—Result of the trial—Advertises an engraved portrait of himself—Travels about to give lectures—Is chosen member for Oldham, and qualified by his colleague to take his seat—Visits Ireland and Scotland.

In the early part of 1826, Cobbett contemplated a third attempt to become a senator, resolving to offer himself, at the expected dissolution of Parliament, for the borough of Preston, in Lancashire, a county in which he had always a great number of admirers. At Preston, too, the right of suffrage, even in the days before the Reform Bill, was shared by almost all the inhabitants of the place. In February a meeting of his supporters was called at the Freemason's Tavern, from whence, as they found the building too small, they adjourned to Lincoln's Inn Fields. Sir Thomas Beevor, a Norfolk baronet, who entertained a high opinion of Cobbett's judgment on agricultural matters, and who was ridiculed in the newspapers as "Sir Thomas Swallowall,"

was induced to preside, and to propose a subscription to promote Mr Cobbett's return to Parliament; a proposal which was seconded by Colonel Johnson. Cobbett, having made a speech of professions, Hunt followed him; and after having declared his willingness to forward Cobbett's success, reminded the meeting of a pledge which Cobbett had given to the electors of Honiton in 1806, and had repeated in 1812, that he would never receive, either for himself or his family, under any name or pretence, a single farthing of the public money. Hunt said his motive for adverting to this pledge was, that Cobbett, by repeating it, might secure a greater share of confidence from his supporters. A number of those present seconded Hunt by crying out "The pledge! the pledge!" Cobbett was evidently annoyed by the mention of the subject, and observed that what a man had declared in 1806 was surely binding on him in 1826; that to call on him to repeat an oath which he had already sworn was to ask him to degrade himself; that what he had professed must continue to influence him, and he entreated that his friends would spare him the humiliation of repetition. This tame declaration was by no means satisfactory to the meeting; nevertheless the subscription then set on foot amounted at length to a considerable sum. Cobbett, in his Register, attributed Hunt's remarks to spite; and the consequence was, a grand quarrel between these two great champions of Reform, who had for some time been jealous of each other's pretensions to popularity. The breach between them was soon after widened by an accusation which Hunt, in giving evidence on a trial, brought against Cobbett of having

withheld certain moneys that he had received in aid of a subscription for one Byrne. Cobbett charged Hunt with perjury, and Hunt retorted by bringing an action against Cobbett for libel. The jury, however, gave a verdict for Cobbett, on the ground that Hunt's character was not at all lowered by the imputation.

While he was waiting for the dissolution of Parliament, Cobbett turned his attention to various other matters by which he hoped to profit. He was engaged on his 'History of the Protestant Reformation,' and on a work about trees, called 'The Woodlands,' both to be published in numbers. He was now stooping to the meanest devices by which money might be obtained. He advertised in his Register seeds and trees of his own culture for sale. He offered apple-trees at ninepence each, but advised his friends to take a hundred at a time for three pounds, that so they might save fifteen shillings; adding that his "*cleverness*" in rearing them "*it would be folly to dispute.*" He had for sale ten copies of a map of America at four guineas each, "*the completest thing he ever saw in his life;*" and, "*to convince his readers that it was a good thing,*" he would keep one copy for his own use, and dispose only of nine. He gave notice, disinterestedly, as he stated, of a bronze medal of himself for sale, speaking of it in his own peculiar style: "There is a bronze medal of me made from a cast taken about a year ago. It is about four inches in diameter, and is, *I believe*, a very good likeness, as far as such things ever are or can be likenesses. It is, *by my permission*, sold at No. 183 Fleet Street, *for the artist or proprietor. I do not recommend any one to purchase it;* it was not made by my desire.

I yielded with great reluctance to the taking of the cast. I have no interest whatever in this thing; but I think it would have been hard to refuse to give this notice of it. *The price is one pound*, which I consider cheap." But notwithstanding all this profession, says Mr Huish, "it was well known that the whole affair was got up by himself, and that the profits were to go into his own pocket." The scheme, however, was a failure, for the public either thought the medal too dear, or did not care to possess Cobbett's likeness. Some remarked that they had had enough of his bronze.

In May the dissolution of Parliament took place. Cobbett issued an address to the electors of Preston, telling them that they had seen what he could do out of the House, and hoping that they would enable him to show what he could do in the House. On the 16th of the month, attended by Sir Thomas Beevor, he paid his respects to them in person; and the two friends having made, as they considered, a favourable impression, returned to London to urge forward the subscription for paying the election expenses. "The villains of the press," as Cobbett called them, "took note of the proceedings," and stigmatised him as "The Mendicant Candidate," and "The Beggarman;" but he was callous to all their reproaches. When the day of election came he presented himself again at Preston, accompanied by his four sons. He had three candidates to oppose, Mr Stanley, afterwards Lord Derby, Mr Wood, and Captain Barrie. In his addresses to the electors he was coarse, and lost himself several votes by throwing out offensive personalities against the other candidates.

He said he loathed and detested Captain Barrie, because he wished to make the Catholics take the oath of supremacy. He called Mr Wood "the prince of hypocrites," and said that he despised him from the bottom of his soul; and towards Mr Stanley his expressions had still more of turpitude. A large portion of the multitude hooted him for his foul language, and reviled him as a bone-grubber. At the close of the election the numbers were—for Stanley, 3044; Wood, 1982; Barrie, 1657; Cobbett, 995. Yet, after this result, he had the audacity to tell the readers of his Register that, when he presented himself on the following day to the multitude, and asked them whether they would still wish him to be their member, "never was there such a show of hands, never approbation so unanimous, cheers so cordial, and honours so great!" In consequence of his hyperbolical account of the respect paid him at Bolton as he passed through it on his return, where he said that everybody, male and female, shook hands with him till his wrists were sore, he was caricatured seated in a carriage, with his arms extended like those of a clothes-horse, out of the windows, and bawling to a crowd of ragged and dirty wenches and urchins, who are kissing his hands, "I am William Cobbett, the enlightener of the human race!"

His disappointment at Preston was long a subject of uneasy reflection to Cobbett, as appeared from numbers of articles in his Register, in which he continued to abuse the members elected, and to alienate more of the public by his grossness. He prepared, according to a promise which he had made, a petition to the House of Commons against the return, but was unable to pro-

cure the two sureties required by law. To his mortification was added perpetual annoyance from the writers for the press, who unmercifully ridiculed his self-conceit and self-praise. Nor did he raise himself in the public opinion by consenting, at a public meeting for considering some recent Ministerial changes, to a reconciliation with Hunt, who had prosecuted him for libel, whom he had been reviling for some time before with all the abusive epithets that the English language afforded, and by whom he had been not less resolutely, though perhaps less copiously and effectively, reviled in return.

His character as a public man was still more seriously damaged by his outrageous behaviour at a dinner at the Crown and Anchor, given to Sir Francis Burdett, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of his election for Westminster. When Sir Francis proposed "a full, fair, and free representation of the people in Parliament," Cobbett started up to offer an amendment. His proposition was the signal for such an uproar as was probably never heard before or since at a public dinner. There were loud cries of "Turn him out," and a disposition was shown by a large party to do what was suggested. Cobbett, however, had not gone without supporters, who introduced two constables to guard him, and kept up the clamour until he should be heard. At last, as there seemed to be no other mode of mitigating the tumult, he was allowed to speak, when he declared his amendment to be, "That his Majesty should be solicited to eject from his councils all enemies to Reform, and especially that implacable enemy to Reform, Mr Canning, at whose back Sir Francis Burdett had

consented to sit." What he endeavoured to say in support of this amendment was drowned in noise; and after exhausting himself in futile efforts to be heard, he sat down amid a general shout. When the health of Sir Francis was proposed he again rose, and vociferated "No, no," flourishing his arms above his head in the most astonishing manner. Fresh indications appeared of a determination to eject him. He roared out that Sir Francis was "a traitor to the cause of the people." The health of John Cam Hobhouse being drunk, Mr Hobhouse rose to return thanks, and Cobbett rose at the same moment and refused to give way. He placed his arms a-kimbo, thrust out his tongue, and gnashed his teeth. Hobhouse's party cheered and clapped their hands; Cobbett's hissed, howled, and screamed. Cobbett bawled out the name of Hobhouse with offensive epithets; and Hobhouse at last, provoked beyond endurance, snatched a wand from one of the stewards, and declared that he would knock Cobbett down unless he desisted, though he was a miscreant unworthy of any gentleman's chastisement. Cobbett and his party retorted in the language of Billingsgate. The others asked why he did not pay Sir Francis what he had borrowed, and reproached him with having grubbed up Tom Paine's bones only to make money of them. The rest of the evening was passed in similar contention and uproar; Sir Francis Burdett and his friends in vain endeavouring to restore order. Nothing could have been more disgraceful and injurious to Cobbett and those who upheld him, whether for the sake of Reform or the sake of a row. Yet, according to Cobbett's version of the affair in his Register, nothing could have

been more honourable to him; compared with him, Hobhouse was a cipher, and Sir Francis Burdett "a wriggling, twisting, shuffling, whimpering, canting, culprit," who would have been thrown out of the window but for Cobbett's interference to protect him.

In 1821 Cobbett had taken a house in High Street, Kensington, which he continued to occupy for several years. During the early part of his residence there, a report was circulated in the newspapers, metropolitan and provincial, that he had turned the front part of his dwelling into a butcher's shop, where, after vainly offering mutton and beef for sale, he had become bankrupt as a butcher. This statement offers unhappy encouragement to those defamers whose maxim is "to throw dirt enough," in the hope that "some of it will stick;" for this piece of dirt, then thrown at Cobbett, stuck to him till last year, when it was copied by Sir Henry Bulwer without any suspicion of its untruth, and might even now be believed, but for a contradiction of it by one of Mr Cobbett's sons in the 'Standard.' Cobbett, it appears, never lowered himself to that species of trade; he noticed the report as a falsehood in his Register, and alludes to it in his 'Rural Rides,' with the remark that "the gentlemen of the *respectable* part of the press do not mind lying a little upon a pinch." But if he did not employ himself in selling meat, he was not slow to offer other articles for sale, which he had got into his hands in great number and variety, and of which he was anxious that the public should relieve him. Every 'Weekly Political Register' set forth the excellences of all or sundry of them, "the very best in all England," or

in the whole world. He had trees running through the alphabet from apple to tulip tree, plants of which latter he offered at £4, 5s. apiece. He had Indian corn, of the first quality, imported from America in oaken barrels; and American seeds at £5 a box. But the purchasers of these seeds, to understand their excellence, must purchase also his work called the 'Woodlands,' in which alone their properties were fully described. The puffs in his Register were among the most amusing portions of it. But the sale of the matters which he thus recommended to the public was not large enough to supply the daily requirements of himself and his family. In vain he assured his readers that though there were tricks in all trades, there was fair dealing in his. Purchasers were not attracted in sufficient numbers to prevent the seller from still having to struggle with pecuniary difficulties.

From his house in the west he directed his gaze at times towards the regions of the east, and was induced, by some ill-grounded hope of distinction in the city, to offer himself for the place of common-councilman in the ward of Farringdon Without. Hunt came forward at the same time as a candidate for the same office; and the two Radicals, on meeting, again lauded each other with compliments. Hunt was duly nominated, but Cobbett declared that he would not submit to a nomination, the truth being, that no one was willing to support him. Much abuse was bandied to and fro between the regular civic candidates and the intruders. But Cobbett, after all, never ventured to the poll, and Hunt went to it to no purpose.

During his residence at Kensington he addressed a petition to the King, through Sir Robert Peel, for a remission of the fine of £1000, which he had paid for his libel about the flogging at Ely. Peel acknowledged the receipt of the petition, and acquainted Cobbett that it had been laid before his Majesty, but had been returned "without the signification of any commands."*

Being obliged to quit his house at Kensington, he went to Barnes, in Surrey, and took a farm called Barn Elms, where he cultivated his Indian corn, and sowed his American seeds.

But he did not rest contented without making another attempt to put money into his pocket by a subscription. His proposal of this scheme appeared in his Register of the 10th of April 1830. Money was to be collected in all the counties of England for the purpose of qualifying two members of Parliament, himself to be one, and the other to be of his nomination. Ten thousand pounds, he thought, would be sufficient, but he should have no objection if that sum were exceeded. "Two pounds each," said he, "from every reader of the Register, *would about do the thing;*—forbearance from one glass of grog for one market-day, on the part of each farmer, *would do the thing.* . . . My friends should write to me as soon as possible, at 183 Fleet Street, postage paid, authorising me to say that they will be collectors; that I should then publish their names; that they should, if they choose, appoint some one of themselves to receive their various collections, and that when the sum is completed for the county—say £790 for Middlesex, £770 for Lancashire,

* Treatise on Indian Corn, Art. 185.

Nottinghamshire £350, and so on—it shall be transmitted to me, and my receipt of it to be published. If any gentleman chooses to subscribe singly, he may do it at Fleet Street, where a book will be kept for the purpose; or he may do it by letter to me, paying the postage." The speculation, however, proved another failure. Cobbett himself testified how paltry was the result of it. In the Register of the 1st of May he gave the name of seven persons who were willing to receive subscriptions; and soon after acknowledged the receipt of £12, 2s. for Middlesex, £10 for Herefordshire, and £5 for Northamptonshire, making a total of £27, 2s. towards the £10,000. After this the subject is no more mentioned in his pages; and as the subscribers were anonymous, he of course made no attempt to return their insignificant contributions.

During the years 1829 and 1830 there was much discontent in various parts of England, and a number of incendiary fires broke out. This state of things was attributed partly to the eagerness for a reform of Parliament, and partly to agricultural distress. On these topics it was not to be expected that Cobbett's Register could be silent. On the contrary, he descanted on them with such acrimony, and expressed himself with such hostility to the Government, that his language was brought under the notice of the House of Commons, and on the 7th of July 1831 he was brought to trial in the Court of King's Bench, on the prosecution of Sir Thomas Denman, Attorney-General, for libel, in having sought to incite the agricultural labourers to acts of insurrection and violence, and to the destruction of property. Lord Tenterden was judge. Cobbett,

attended by a solicitor, stood forward to plead his own cause. In the indictment he was called *a labourer*.

In the passages of the Register on which the accusation was founded, Cobbett had said that the labourers knew that one thrashing-machine took wages from ten men; that they were aware that they would never have had any of the food which they burned; that their proceedings had been free from ferocity and cruelty; that they might have burned or maimed people, but had carefully abstained from such atrocities. "They have done desperate things," he said, in one place, "but they were driven to desperation. All men, except the infamous stock-jobbing race, say, and loudly say, that their object is just; that they ought to have that for which they are striving; and all men, except that same hellish crew, say that they had no other means of obtaining it."

Sir Thomas Denman, in commenting on these words, and others of the same tendency, was often interrupted by Cobbett, who insisted on being termed a labourer, according to his designation in the indictment. Lord Tenterden was at times obliged to interfere, and told him at last that if he would not be silent he must be removed from the Court. "Unless the Attorney-General call me a labourer," replied Cobbett, "I must protest every time." Denman was annoyed by Cobbett's persistence, and provoked to increased severity of language, so that, in conclusion, he almost asked the jury to lay aside all thoughts of mercy.

Cobbett's speech in his defence lasted six hours, embracing much matter, and much abuse, that had little to do with his argument. One of the chief points

which he endeavoured to press upon the jury was, that the prosecution was a mere pretext of the Government to inflict pecuniary ruin upon him, and lodge him in a jail, lest the effect of his writings on the public should lead to reductions in their emoluments. "For years," said he, "I have been labouring to lop off useless places and pensions, and that touches the faction. These Whigs, who have been out of office for five-and-twenty years, these lank Whigs, lank and merciless as a hungry wolf, are now filling their purses with the public money, and I must be crushed; and to-day, gentlemen, they will crush me, unless you stand between me and them." Another point that he urged was, that he had endeavoured, not to increase, but to diminish, the destruction of life and property. A commission had been sent out to inquire into the outrages, and from that commission he had dreaded many executions. He had written much on this head, and if the jury would carefully consider what he had written, they would surely come to no other conclusion than that he had desired to save the lives of the unfortunate persons accused under the commission. Such being his object, was it possible to suppose that he would incite men of that class to acts of outrage, which would be the very means to defeat his purpose?

Cobbett, however many his conduct had alienated, had still a party of the discontented lower class ready to raise their voices in his behalf; and this was a case in which many of the more reasonable class thought he was unjustly accused. When he ceased to speak, therefore, there were heard from the gallery loud acclamations, which Lord Tenterden—who had often been

obliged, during the course of Cobbett's speech, to check bursts of applause by threatening that the gallery should be cleared—could scarcely suppress. A number of witnesses were then called to testify to Cobbett's character, and to state their belief as to the tendency of his writings in regard to incendiarism and other agricultural outrages. Among these were Lord Brougham, who bore witness that Cobbett had formerly written against the breaking of machinery; and Lord Radnor, who did not think him, he said, disposed to excite the working classes to insurrection; and several other gentlemen expressed their conviction that he was not a man likely to entertain the intentions imputed to him.

The jury retired at a quarter past six. Lord Tenterden waited for the report till ten, and then left them, directing the proper officer to record the verdict, if any should be given in his absence; but they remained locked up during the whole night without coming to any decision. Nor had they consented to a verdict when Lord Tenterden returned into Court on the following morning; and as they had then been confined fifteen hours, and declared that there was no probability of their agreement, six being of one opinion and six of another, his lordship declared them discharged.

This was a great triumph to Cobbett, and was indeed the only great legal triumph that he ever obtained. Nor did he fail to make the most of it. The cutting remarks of the Attorney-General he never forgot; and the letters which he afterwards addressed in his Register to "Lord Denman, chief judge," and signed "William Cobbett, labourer," are bitter proofs of the

keenness with which he had felt the attack. Nor was he the only member of the Whig Administration that Cobbett made an object of hostility. But he could not forbear attempting to turn his escape from the law to some paltry pecuniary profit. "Several gentlemen" had called upon him, he stated in his Register, to propose a subscription to defray his expenses, or to give him a dinner on the occasion. For dinners he cared little, he said, and a subscription he absolutely declined; but "anything that is done," he added, "should be calculated to have a lasting effect, such as a piece of plate presented to me, having inscribed on it the history of this prosecution. . . . In the mean time I will publish, in a very few days, a full-length portrait of myself, with a facsimile of my own handwriting; the price of the portrait will be ten shillings. I shall be drawn in the dress at which I appeared at the trial." The portrait was published, but the hint about the plate was unheeded.

After the termination of his trial, till the passing of the Reform Bill in 1832, he was diligently engaged in writing, and in travelling through the country to give lectures. He went through the north of England and the south of Scotland, everywhere abusing the Government, and being received by the Radical population of the towns with welcome and acclamations. During his travels he published bulletins of his proceedings, showing when he arrived at and quitted the various places in his way, at what inns he dined, and other trifling particulars about him, amply displaying his vanity and egotism. At a public dinner given him by the Radicals at Glasgow, he showed that he had not

ceased to boast of matters respecting himself which the well-informed part of the public knew to be entirely groundless. A portion of his speech on the occasion is thus reported: "It was said he was fond of money, very fond indeed; when he might have rolled in it in 1803; again, when the Whigs came into power in 1806, and again in 1817. At all these times *he might have had as much as he could ask in a reasonable way;* not perhaps a boll of guineas, but *he was sure it might have been a bushel.* The Government considered which was best, whether *to expend millions on hirelings to write him down, or to give him* £100,000 *to keep him silent.* All these offers had been published, with the times and circumstances, but they were invariably refused." Could Cobbett have expected these statements to be believed?

While he was in Scotland he published striking descriptions of various parts of the country in his Register, which he afterwards collected into a small volume. But the great object of his travels and his lectures was to influence the voters with regard to the elections under the expected Reform Bill, so that a majority of "Radicals" might be returned. His earnestness of manner, clearness of language, and boldness of assertion, were well adapted to sway the minds of the uninstructed and unreasoning multitude.

About this time we find him again quarrelling with Hunt; and Hunt, who had now become member for Preston, presented a petition to the House of Commons from certain labourers who had been employed by Cobbett, praying that a law might be enacted against "the truck system," which Cobbett had adopted,

and, instead of paying them in coin, had obliged them to take their wages in "bad mutton, cheap pickled pork, and black Indian-corn meal, such as the hogs of the said William Cobbett had been known to refuse." Cobbett retorted upon Hunt in his 'Twopenny Trash,' for April 1831, calling him "a great ignorant and impudent oaf," in whom the people of Preston had been completely deceived. "A greater fool," he said to them, "you *might* have chosen, for there were the lunatic hospitals for you to go to, to get a representative; but as liar, your choice sets at defiance all approach towards equality, whether in real life or in fiction."

When the new Bill was passed, Cobbett was ready to make another effort for Parliamentary distinction, and was delighted to receive, on the same day, invitations from the Radical parties of Manchester and Oldham to present himself to their constituencies. Resolving to accept the two strings that were offered for his bow, he replied favourably to both invitations; and as the elections took place at the same time, and the two places were but eight miles apart, he went backwards and forwards, during the proceedings, from one to the other, offering himself as a candidate at each. Fortunately for him, the election at Oldham, coming to a close first, terminated in his favour, placing him second of its two members; had he been dependent on Manchester he would have been again left in grief, being the lowest on the poll of five candidates. He wrote an address, full of congratulation and profession, in the name of himself and the other successful candidate, Mr Fielden, to the people of Oldham, who had

given an example, he said, of true purity of election; for neither money nor drink had been offered to them as bribes, nor had any voter been canvassed individually for his suffrage. In his Register he told his readers that his return to Parliament was an event on which all Europe had looked with interest.

But though he was chosen, he was not yet qualified, to sit in the House of Commons. Of the three hundred a-year in landed property, necessary to enable him to take his seat, he had little. But the liberality of his colleague—whose influence, indeed, seems to have secured his election—assisted him out of his difficulty; and his claim to a place in the senate was admitted. Thus he obtained, in 1832, an object which he had begun to pursue in 1806.

Before the new Parliament met, he made a journey through Ireland, for the purpose of seeing with his own eyes, as he said, the state of things in a country which had afforded such fertile subjects for controversy. What he observed he communicated to the public in a 'Letter to Marshall,' one of his farm-labourers. He was well received by the Irish, though much of the stir made about him arose, doubtless, from curiosity. Even Daniel O'Connell, notwithstanding a severe letter from Cobbett to him on the introduction of poor-laws into Ireland, and other strong language that had passed between them, invited him to Derrynane Abbey; and Cobbett, though he declined his hospitality for the present, promised to make, at some future time, another journey to Ireland for the purpose of visiting him. Whether this promise of Cobbett's was sincere may be doubted, for Cobbett was little inclined

to forgive; but, whether sincere or not, it was never fulfilled. He went on a tour through the lowlands of Scotland, also, in the latter part of the same year, lecturing at Glasgow, Berwick, and in several other towns; and was wonderfully delighted with an address presented to him at Edinburgh, signed by about six hundred of the busy obscure, and extolling him as an "uncompromising advocate of the rights of the people."

CHAPTER XIV.

Cobbett in the House of Commons—Obstinately demands to be heard—Descriptions of his personal appearance—Proposes his son as member for Coventry—Character of his speaking in Parliament—His imprudent attack on Sir Robert Peel—His proceedings in the case of Popay, a disguised policeman—His re-election for Oldham—His death.

WHEN the House of Commons assembled, on the 7th of February 1833, Cobbett showed that he was by no means disposed to be a silent member of it, but was ready to indulge his constant propensity to combat. When Mr Charles Manners Sutton was proposed as Speaker, Cobbett was among the Opposition. When the King's speech, and the address in reply to it, came under consideration, Cobbett was one of the Radical members that objected to the address drawn up by the Ministry. When the report on the address was brought up, he moved that the whole of the address should be rejected, and that one of his own composition should be adopted, in which his Majesty was to be assured that Parliament would direct its attention to the Bank of England, the East India Company, and the state of Ireland. Speaking at some length on this subject, and being interrupted by expressions of impatience, and calls for a division, he declared that there should be no division for two hours unless he was allowed to say what he wished. This threat, as his obstinacy was

well known, procured him a hearing. But on the division he was supported only by 23 Ayes against 323 Noes.

His ardour for Parliamentary honours was much damped by so signal a defeat, but he continued to urge motions from time to time during the session, though never with much effect.

A description of his personal appearance in Parliament, by the author of 'Random Recollections of the House of Commons,' though written after his death, may not improperly be introduced here:—

"In stature the late Mr Cobbett was tall and athletic. I should think he could not have been less than six feet two, while his breadth was proportionably great. He was indeed one of the stoutest men in the House. . . . His hair was of a milk-white colour, and his complexion ruddy. His features were not strongly marked. What struck you most about his face was his small, sparkling, laughing eyes. When disposed to be humorous yourself, you had only to look at his eyes, and you were sure to sympathise with his merriment. When not speaking, the expression of his eye and his countenance was very different. He was one of the most striking refutations of the principles of Lavater I ever witnessed. Never were the looks of any man more completely at variance with his character. There was something so dull and heavy about his whole appearance, that any one who did not know him would at once set him down for some country clodpole, to use a favourite expression of his own, who not only never read a book, or had a single idea in his head, but who was a mere mass of mortality,

without a particle of sensibility of any kind in his composition. He usually sat with one leg over the other, his head slightly drooping, as if sleeping, on his breast, and his hat down almost to his eyes. His usual dress was a light-grey coat, of a full make, a white waistcoat, and kerseymere breeches of a sandy colour. When he walked about the House, he generally had his hands inserted in his breeches' pockets. Considering his advanced age, seventy-three, he looked remarkably hale and healthy, and walked with a firm but slow step."

This description is very similar to that which was given of him by Samuel Bamford, who saw him some years before at a meeting at the Crown and Anchor:—

"Had I met him anywhere else save in the room and on that occasion, I should have taken him for a gentleman farming his own broad estate. He seemed to have that kind of self-possession and ease about him, together with a certain bantering jollity, which are so natural to fast-handed and well-housed lords of the soil. He was, I should suppose, not less than six feet in height; portly, with a fresh, clear, and round cheek, and a small grey eye, twinkling with good-humoured archness. He was dressed in a blue coat, yellow swans'-down waistcoat, drab kerseymere small-clothes, and top-boots. His hair was grey, and his cravat and linen fine, and very white."*

It may be supposed that his Register was made the vehicle for communicating to his portion of the public what he said and did in Parliament, and in

* Passages in the Life of a Radical, by Samuel Bamford, vol. i. p. 18.

reference to all matters connected with it; and never were his vanity and self-glorification more egregiously displayed. When there was a vacancy for a member at Coventry, in consequence of Mr Ellice, who had long sat for the place, having taken office under the Government, Cobbett thought that he might take upon himself to recommend a candidate for the seat. He received a letter, he said, from a Mr Alexander Yates, requesting him to name a fit member for Coventry; and he replied by naming, not a person of rank or influence in the county, but his own son, Mr John M. Cobbett, acquainting Mr Yates at the same time, and the other electors of Coventry, that both his sons were "so ticklish, so thin-skinned," in regard to anything said about their merits, that he had been obliged to offer Mr John Cobbett's services to the people of Coventry without informing him of his intention. When the day of election came on, Mr John Cobbett was of course put in nomination, but no candidate of that name appeared, for he was detained, according to his father's statement, by illness in London, and Mr Ellice was re-elected without opposition. "This would not have been the case," said the proprietor of the Register to his readers, "had I been there; a few speeches and addresses from me would have done the thing, and tripped up the heels of Ellice." But the real cause of Mr John Cobbett's absence is said to have been that his father had at first offered to pay the expenses of his son's venture, but had afterwards declined; and no other person was found to incur the responsibility.*

* Huish's Memoirs of Cobbett, vol ii. p. 435.

His Parliamentary career was, on the whole, of a much more quiet character than either his friends or his enemies had expected. Having been somewhat cowed at the commencement, and having found himself an object of less consideration to his six hundred and fifty-seven compeers than he had hoped, he was in a great degree tamed and sobered down. Nor was he at any time of his life, it would seem, good at debate, or possessed of that readiness of speech necessary to success in the House of Commons. He could harangue and lecture to an attentive audience, as he could dictate political articles, while his flow of thought was uninterrupted; but questions disconcerted him, and contradiction put him out of temper. He was deficient in versatility and resource. Aptitude for Parliamentary speaking is not generally acquired without much practice. Had Cobbett entered the senate at an earlier period of life, he would doubtless have succeeded in it better; but he was too old, at seventy, to attain facility as an orator. He spoke once or twice with good effect, but he was always too ready to talk of himself, and of his own doings and claims to notice, and to indulge in personalities towards others.

His most imprudent proceeding in Parliament was his motion for an address to his Majesty, praying him to strike Sir Robert Peel's name out of the list of Privy Councillors. "The absurd ground for this motion," says one of Cobbett's biographers, "was the alteration of the currency, made under the auspices of the right honourable baronet (as far back as 1819). A motion more frivolous, more absurd, and, with pain it must be added, more disreputable to its author, was never made

within the walls of either House of Parliament. On the change in the currency opinions have differed, and will continue to differ, but the honourable motives of Sir Robert Peel have never been questioned by any but Mr Cobbett; and to inflict a severe mark of disgrace upon a distinguished statesman for a line of conduct conscientiously adopted in the discharge of his duty to the Crown and country, would have been an act of injustice which few men, it may be hoped, in any station, would have dared to recommend. When Sir Robert Peel rose to address the House, he was received with the most deafening cheers, which lasted upwards of a quarter of an hour. The division (for the motion was actually pressed to a division) was equally triumphant in his favour. In a house of 302 members, 4 only were found to vote with Mr Cobbett, leaving 298 to ratify the triumph of Sir Robert Peel." Nor was this the whole of the discomfiture that fell upon Cobbett. The Chancellor of the Exchequer immediately rose, and, observing that never within his knowledge had a personal attack been made in the House on such grounds, moved that the resolution proposed by the member for Oldham should not be entered on the minutes. Cobbett in vain offered resistance, saying, "If the House prevent this resolution from being entered on the minutes, then there are but two things left for Ministers to do; first, to let no man speak in the House without their permission; and next, to order that the gallery be closed." The Speaker put the question, and there were 295 votes for it, and only 6 against it. No enemy of Cobbett could have more effectually destroyed his influence in

the House than he himself destroyed it by this unlucky proceeding of his own.

In June 1833, Cobbett readily listened to the request of certain inhabitants of Camberwell and Walworth, members of a political union, to present a petition from them to Parliament, complaining that one William Popay, a policeman, had mixed with them disguised in plain clothes, for the purpose of impelling them into seditious courses, and in the hope of benefiting himself by giving information against them. Cobbett made a speech on the occasion, animadverting severely on the treachery of the policeman, accusing the Government of having been privy to his proceedings, and praying that a Committee might be appointed to examine into the affair. The prayer for a Committee, after some discussion, was granted, and Cobbett was chosen a member of it—the only Parliamentary Committee, we believe, of which he ever was a member. The evidence taken amounted to 182 folio pages, and Cobbett filled up many columns of his Register with extracts from it. He did not forget to mention, at the same time, the extreme attention that he had bestowed on the case; "for," said he, "I was never absent from any one sitting, and never one minute out of the room during one sitting." He proposed to the Committee, consistently with his self-sufficiency, a Report written wholly by himself, in which he admitted that he was influenced by "a rooted hatred to the police establishment." "I hate it," he told the readers of his Register, "because it is of foreign growth, and because it is French; I hate it because it really tears up the Government; the good-

natured Government—the gentle, the confiding, the neighbourly and friendly Government—under which I was born, and under which my forefathers lived!" But the rest of the Committee rejected Cobbett's Report, and agreed on another. He had the satisfaction, however, of knowing that the House considered the complaints against Popay fully proved, and of seeing him dismissed from the police force.

At the general election, consequent on the appointment of Sir Robert Peel to the premiership, he was re-elected for Oldham, and returned to his Parliamentary duties with his usual diligence. But he had been for some time suffering from a tendency to inflammation in the throat, and the annoyance from it was gradually increasing. When the Marquis of Chandos made a motion for a repeal of the malt-tax, Cobbett attempted to speak on the question, but was unable to make himself heard. He recovered in some degree, but, not taking sufficient care of himself, he again grew worse, and died on the 17th of June 1835.

CHAPTER XV.

Remarks on Cobbett's character and career—His self-contradictions—His conceit of himself—His cleverness in nicknaming his adversaries—His writings—'Rural Rides'—Extract from the book—'Advice to Young Men'—Admonitions to parents—How he brought up his children—His 'English Grammar'—His 'Cottage Economy'—His 'Sermons'—His astonishing 'History of the Protestant Reformation'—Extravagant assertions in it—His 'History of the Regency and Reign of George IV.'—His 'Woodlands'—Translation of 'Martens's Law of Nations'—Concluding remarks on Cobbett as a writer and a man.

WE have thus gone through the life of William Cobbett. We could wish that we had found, in a man of such vigour of mind, and such command of clear and forcible expression, a greater regard for truth and honesty, and less of inclination to do and say what would serve his purpose merely for the passing hour. His first departure from the requirements of honour was in failing to appear at the court-martial which he had procured on his officers; a failure of which he offered no defence at the time, and which nothing that he said many years afterwards could justify or palliate. Of pecuniary obligations he began to show great disregard at his first return from America, when he indulged in publishing speculations which his means could not be considered to warrant, and soon after took land into his hands for which he had no certain prospect of

paying—proceedings by which he in a few years involved himself hopelessly in debt. He then, going off again to America, sent his creditors word, from the other side of the Atlantic, that he had found a reason why he should not attempt to pay them a farthing; and insulted Sir Francis Burdett, who had kindly lent him money in his difficulties, by pretending that the loan had been a gift. His denial that he had proposed to the Government to discontinue his Register for a consideration, and his prevarications under the consciousness that his words could be disproved, were examples how utterly he could set veracity at nought. His attempts to make money by the sale of Tom Paine's hair, and to raise subscriptions professedly to promote "Reform," but in reality to enrich himself, were mere deceptive experiments on the credulity of the public.

His frequent contradictions of what he had previously asserted, with regard both to men and things, were shameless and astounding. There was scarcely a public character, or public matter, that he had praised or blamed, that he did not afterwards speak of in a contrary manner. How he first ridiculed and scouted Paine, and then extolled him as the greatest of mankind, we have already seen. As to his other cases of tergiversation, several pamphlets were published, a little before and after his death, containing the drollest exposures of them. Pitt he extolled at one time as the preserver of his country, and afterwards declared that Pitt's principles and measures had brought his country to destruction. Fox he pronounced to be a wise and honest statesman, and then said that he had traitor-

ously endeavoured to bring England under the yoke of Buonaparte. Lord Grenville he called a great and upright man, and then derided him as a weak-headed blunt-witted lord. There was *nil medium*—nothing of a golden mean in his judgments:—

> "So over-violent, or over-civil,
> That every man with him was God or devil."

Mr Perceval, for a time, was a man than whom it would have been difficult to find a better, but afterwards was one of the most cruel, corrupt, and hypocritical of mankind. Sir Samuel Romilly was the most able and honest lawyer in England, and a person whose talents were useless, and whose life was unimportant. Lord Erskine was a powerful orator, and a chattering magpie. Mr Waithman was eminently qualified for the House of Commons, and fit only to be great among haberdashers; a man of talent and an empty shoy-hoy. Perry he praised as sensible, honest, and humane, and censured as mean, malignant, and mercenary; and said of him, "I wonder he is not ashamed to be seen alive." Lord Castlereagh had talents of superior order, and was "the most shallow-pated ass that ever stood erect." Sir Francis Burdett, while he befriended Cobbett, was a man with a head on his shoulders; but when Cobbett wanted to rid himself of the burden of gratitude, became "a mere Crown and Anchor doll," to be knocked to pieces like the man's wooden god in the fable. Even Malthus was for a while allowed to be reasonable, but afterwards became a callous muddy-headed parson, capable of dictating more cruelties than those of the massacre of St Bartholomew. The American

people were sometimes upright and well-principled, sometimes utterly immoral and abandoned; their Government sometimes the best, and sometimes the worst, in the world. The English multitude, too, among whom he sought his readers, were objects of extravagant censure and praise,—being at one time brutish, stupid, and ignorant, and at another sensible, clear-headed, and enlightened.

Yet the conceit and self-sufficiency of the man who thus easily veered about from one point to another directly opposite, were constant and inexhaustible. He was "the great enlightener of the people of England," who had drawn wisdom from the mouths of babes and sucklings. "I had always weight and power," he said; "wherever I was, I was a leader." "There is in England no subject whatever which excites so much public interest as the character of William Cobbett." "In what way can I be more famed than I am? How can I add to my present stock?" "I have a clear right to say of myself things which it would, in a common case, be immodest to say." "My stock of reputation and of popular confidence is exceeded by that of no man." Such are the flowers of boastfulness that may be plucked from various pages of his works.

One faculty, when he chose to revile, he exerted with great success,—that of nicknaming the objects of his vituperation. "Old Sir Glory" was a well-applied ridicule of the title "Westminster's Pride and England's Glory." Frederick Robinson, afterwards Lord Goderich, was happily called "Prosperity Fred" for his constant promises of good times coming. Egerton Smith, editor of the 'Liverpool Mercury,' was ludi-

crously turned into "Bott Smith" for the rest of his life, on account of something that he had said in allusion to that disease. Mr Thomas Attwood, from some scheme for reducing the National Debt by shillings, was dubbed "Little Shilling Attwood." Lord Erskine was "Baron Clackmannan." Lord Liverpool was "Lord Pinknose Liverpool." Mr Hobhouse was "Sancho Hobhouse." Hunt, for a time, was "the great liar of the South," and Baines "the great liar of the North." Mr Black of the 'Chronicle' was turned into "Doctor Black." The loquacious Brougham was stigmatised as "a mixture of laudanum and brandy, with a double allowance of jaw." The 'Times' was sometimes "The bloody old Times," and sometimes "Annie Brodie," from one of the shareholders in the paper. Another of his aversions was "the lump of horse-dung that is called the 'Globe.'"

Of his writings, those that have had most hold on the attention of readers since his death are his 'Rural Rides,' his 'Advice to Young Men,' his 'English Grammar,' his 'Cottage Economy,' and, let us add, his 'Sermons,' and his 'History of the Protestant Reformation in England.' The hundred volumes of the Register may be said to be completely forgotten, except such of their better contents as were published in six volumes by his sons, which may now and then attract the politician or essayist.

The 'Rural Rides' were written and published as separate papers in the Register during the time that he was travelling hither and thither to lecture for Reform. There are many pleasing paragraphs in them, but when they were collected into a volume they were

not sufficiently weeded. To say nothing of descriptions of soils and crops, which, though just and vivid, occur so frequently that the readers even of his own day must have been wearied with them, there are thrust upon us, *usque ad summam nauseam*, abuses of Pitt and Castlereagh, of the funding and borough-mongering systems, and of the changes wrought by the Protestant Reformation. Nor is he content with abusing what might be supposed within his judgment, but seizes occasions to vent his spleen on men and things utterly beyond his range. He gazes on the buildings of Oxford, and reflects on the drones that they contain, whose "great characteristic is folly, emptiness of head, and want of talent," for "one half of the fellows who are what they call educated here are unfit to be clerks in a grocer's or merchant's shop;" nor could he help congratulating himself that what he had written, during the preceding month, "would produce more effect, and do more good in the world, than all that had, for a hundred years, been produced by all the members of this University." Winchester and Westminster schools, he declares, send out only "frivolous idiots." At Johnson, of whose powers and knowledge he had no conception, he sneers as a teacher of moping and melancholy, whose writings had been driven into oblivion "by light, reason, and the French Revolution." Young's 'Night Thoughts' he pronounces "bombastical stuff." Cranmer he calls "a perfidious hypocrite and double apostate," who "certainly deserved his fate." The only subject on which his abuse can be thought fairly bestowed is the game-laws. He indulges in coarse terms and expressions everywhere

throughout the book, and allows them to become more numerous as he proceeds.

Having said so much in dispraise of the volume, let me extract a passage in his best manner, in which it may well be wished that more was to be found. He thus speaks of Weston Grove, an estate near Netley Abbey, and its owner, Mr Chamberlayne :—

"Everything that nature can do has been done here; and money, most judiciously employed, has come to her assistance. Here are a thousand things to give pleasure to any rational mind; but there is one thing which, in my estimation, surpasses, in pleasure to contemplate, all the lawns and all the groves, and all the gardens and all the game, and everything else; and that is, the real unaffected goodness of the owner of the estate. He is a member for Southampton; he has other fine estates; he has great talents; he is much admired by all who know him; but he has done more by his justice, by his just way of thinking with regard to the labouring people, than in all other ways put together. This was nothing new to me, for I was well informed of it several years ago, though I had never heard him speak of it in my life. When he came to this place, the common wages of day-labouring men were thirteen shillings a-week, and the wages of carpenters, bricklayers, and other tradesmen, were in proportion. Those wages he has given, from that time to this, without any abatement whatever. With these wages a man can live, having at the same time other advantages attending the working for such a man as Mr Chamberlayne. He has got less money in his bags than he would have had if he had ground men down

in their wages; but if his sleep be not sounder than that of the hard-fisted wretch that can walk over grass and gravel, kept in order by a poor creature who is half-starved, — if his sleep be not sounder than the sleep of such a wretch, then all that we have been taught is false, and there is no difference between the man who feeds and the man who starves the poor. . . .

"I know of no county where the poor are worse treated than in many parts of this county of Hants. It is happy to know of one instance in which they are well treated; and I deem it a real honour to be under the roof of him who has uniformly set so laudable an example in this most important concern. What are all his riches to me? They form no title to my respect. 'Tis not for me to set myself up in judgment as to his taste, his learning, his various qualities and endowments; but of these, his unequivocal works, I am a competent judge. I know how much good he must do; and there is a great satisfaction in reflecting on the great happiness that he must feel, when, in laying his head upon his pillow of a cold and dreary winter night, he reflects that there are scores—ay, scores upon scores—of his country people, of his poor neighbours, of those whom the Scripture denominates his brethren, who have been enabled, through him, to retire to a warm bed after spending a cheerful evening, and taking a full meal by the side of their own fire. People may talk what they will about happiness, but I can figure to myself no happiness surpassing that of the man who falls to sleep with reflections like these in his mind.

"Now, observe, it is a duty on my part to relate

what I have here related as to the conduct of Mr Chamberlayne; not a duty towards *him*, for I can do him no good by it, and I do most sincerely believe that both he and his equally benevolent sister would rather that their goodness remained unproclaimed; but it is a duty towards my country, and particularly towards my readers. Here is a striking and a most valuable practical example. Here is a whole neighbourhood of labourers living as they ought to live; enjoying that happiness which is the just reward of their toil. And shall I suppress facts so honourable to those who are the causes of this happiness—facts so interesting in themselves, and so likely to be useful in the way of example; shall I do this, ay, and besides this, tacitly give a false account of Weston Grove, and this, too, from the stupid and cowardly fear of being accused of flattering a rich man?"

If a writer, after his death, according to the remark of Dr Johnson, is judged by his best work, the work by which Cobbett will be judged is undoubtedly his 'Advice to Young Men.' From his directions for conduct in various departments of life, youth may derive much benefit. But the book is disfigured, like 'Rural Rides,' by the intrusion of political sarcasm, and censure of many things offensive only to Cobbett. Because he did not himself care for tea or coffee, he rails at "tea and coffee slops" as being always useless or pernicious. To septennial Parliaments and taxation are attributed evils of which they are far from being the causes. England he declares to have been more populous in the reign of Edward III., when the country "was at its zenith," than it was in the reign of George

III., and imputes the diminution in its number of inhabitants to the influence of the Protestant Reformation. The story of his imprisonment for censuring the flogging at Ely, which he had told a hundred times before, is repeated twice in this volume of precepts. He grudgingly praises book-learning, but admits that for some callings it is requisite; and the importance of a knowledge of grammar he willingly allows, especially if it be gained from *his* Grammar, which it would be "affectation in him, and neglect of duty," not to characterise as the best. From gross expressions he does not abstain, though he uses them less freely than in the Rides.

He gives some very good advice, to which mothers would do well to listen, about bringing girls up at home. "One would think that mothers," he says, "would want no argument to make them shudder at the thought of committing the care of their daughters to other hands than their own. If fortune has so favoured them as to make them rationally desirous that their daughters should have more of what are called accomplishments than they themselves have, it has also favoured them with the means of having teachers under their own eye. If it have not favoured them so highly as this (and it seldom has in the middle rank of life), what duty so sacred as that imposed on a mother to be the teacher of her daughters? And is she, from love of ease, or of pleasure, or of anything else, to neglect this duty? Is she to commit her daughter to the care of persons with whose manners and morals it is impossible for her to be thoroughly acquainted? Is she to send them into the promiscuous

society of girls who belong to nobody knows whom, and come from nobody knows whither, and some of whom, for aught she can know to the contrary, may have been corrupted before, and sent thither to be hidden from their former circle; . . . is she to do all this, and still to put forward pretensions to the authority and the affection of a mother?"

He gives his notions, too, about the bringing up of boys, whom he would have kept more under the eye of the father than those can be who are placed in boarding-schools. His own boys he seems to have brought up carefully, according to his own lights and abilities. No man, he says, was ever more anxious than he was to be the father of a family of clever and learned persons. But he effected everything to this end, he tells us, without scolding, and even without command. "My children," he observes, "are a family of *scholars*, each sex having its appropriate species of learning; and I could safely take my oath that I never *ordered* a child of mine, son or daughter, *to look into a book* in my life. My two eldest sons, when about eight years old, were, for the sake of their health, placed for a very short time at a clergyman's at Micheldever, and my eldest daughter, a little older, at a school a few miles from Botley, to avoid taking them to London in the winter. But, with these exceptions, never had they, while children, *teacher* of any description; and I never, and nobody else ever, taught any one of them to read, write, or anything else, except in *conversation*." He then proceeds to state how he endeavoured to secure their health by exciting in them a taste for the sports of the field and the pleasures of the garden.

"Luckily these things," he says, "were treated of in *books* and *pictures* of endless variety, so that, on wet days, in long evenings, these came into play. A large strong table in the middle of the room, their mother sitting at her work, used to be surrounded with them; the baby, if big enough, being set up in a high chair. Here were inkstands, pens, pencils, india-rubber, and paper, all in abundance, and every one scrabbled about as he or she pleased. There were prints of animals of all sorts; books treating of them; others treating of gardening, of flowers, of husbandry, of hunting, coursing, shooting, fishing, planting, and, in short, of everything with regard to which we *had something to do.* One would be trying to imitate a bit of my writing, another drawing the pictures of some of our dogs or horses, a third poking over Bewick's 'Quadrupeds,' and picking out what he said about them; but our book of never-failing resource was the French *Maison Rustique,* or 'Farmhouse,' which, it is said, was the book that first tempted Duquesnois (I think that was the name), the famous physician, in the reign of Louis XIV., to learn to read. . . . What need had we of *schools?* What need of *teachers?* What need of *scolding* and *force,* to induce children to read, write, and love books? What need of *cards, dice,* or of *any games* to "kill time," but, in fact, to implant in the infant heart the love of *gaming,* one of the most destructive of all human vices? We did not want to "kill time;" we were always *busy,* wet weather or dry weather, winter or summer. There was no *force* in any case, no *command,* no authority; none of these was ever wanted." He encouraged early rising, justly thinking

that for the vice of lounging in bed, especially in young women, no beauty or accomplishments could be considered a compensation. "But to do the things I did," he proceeds, "you must *love home* yourself; to rear up children in this manner, you must *live with them;* you must make them, too, *feel* by your conduct that you *prefer* this to any other mode of passing your time. All men cannot lead this sort of life, but many may, and all much more than many do. My occupation, to be sure, was chiefly carried on *at home;* but I had always enough to do. I never spent an idle week, or even day, in my whole life. Yet I found time to talk with them, to walk or ride about *with them;* and when forced to go from home, always took one or more with me. You must be good-tempered, too, with them; they must like *your* company better than any other person's; they must not wish you away, not fear your coming back, not look upon your departure as a *holiday.* When my business kept me away from the *scrabbling*-table, a petition often came that I would go and talk with the group, and the bearer generally was the youngest, being most likely to succeed." This is a very pretty picture of domestic life in a farmhouse, and such education might be sufficient for boys intended for farmers, but would prove but a poor preparation for the pursuits of professional life. This training, however, such as it was, could have been pursued only during the few years that he continued at Botley; when he got himself into prison, and started off for America, the pupils must have fallen under other hands.

His 'English Grammar,' written in Long Island, in

a series of letters to one of his sons, is rather a collection of strictures on the English language than a proper treatise on it. Those who have previously mastered the grammar in a regular way may find in Cobbett's pages many remarks on composition by which they may profit. The great object of his teaching is to promote clearness of expression, so that a writer's meaning may never be mistaken. He justly condemns indulgence in notes, which commonly indicate an author's matter to be "too much for him," and that he wants the ability "to work it all up into one lucid whole." He reprobates abbreviations as marks of slovenliness and vulgarity. The *caret* he calls the *blunder-mark*, and says that it will seldom be needed by those who think before they write. The use of *dashes*, instead of stops, he heartily dislikes. He gives some admirable admonitions as to the employment of the word *it*, which a writer should never put upon paper without feeling certain that his reader cannot mistake to what it refers; for "when I see many *its* in a page," he says, "I tremble for the writer." But he cannot forbear interspersing among his instructions a large number of political allusions which he would have done well to omit. The language of 'A King's Speech' is subjected to intolerable torture rather for political than grammatical purposes. The hyphen is exemplified by "Edwards, the Government-spy." Nouns of multitude are such as "Mob, Parliament, Rabble, House of Commons, Regiment, Court of King's Bench, Den of Thieves." Forms of expression are illustrated by animadversions on paper-money, pensioners like Dr Johnson, the gang of borough-tyrants, and the Pitt

Club, instituted to insult the people by celebrating the birthday of "the corrupt and cruel Minister." Latin, on the principle of condemning what is not understood, he could not refrain from depreciating, and illustrates one of the uses of the word "there" by the sentence, "There are many men who have been at Latin schools for years, and who at last cannot write six sentences in English correctly." It may be supposed that he means six *consecutive* sentences; but his own language is not in all places impregnably correct and precise. He tells us that we should say, "the bag, with the guineas in it, *were* stolen;" and "zeal, with discretion, *do* much." He writes, "the reports drawn up by the House of Commons, *and which* are compositions discovering in every sentence ignorance the most profound;" and "the languages taught by the professors are called the learned languages, *and which* appellation is intended to cause the mass of the people to believe that the professors and learners of these languages are in point of wisdom far superior to other men." In the formation of past participles of verbs he sets at defiance all ordinary usage, writing not only "bursted," for which Perry attacked him, but *throwed, blowed, ridded, shined, thrusted, sitten,* and *catched.*

Of his 'French Grammar' it is sufficient to say that it is of a similar character. His 'Cottage Economy' contains a number of good hints to cottagers on baking, brewing, keeping pigs, and other household concerns; and he valued himself very much on having directed them how to plait a certain straw which he introduced from America. But his instructions about bees show that he himself had little knowledge of their manage-

ment. He justly makes it a fundamental position that "all substantial improvement in the character and conduct of the poor must begin with an amendment of their condition." But the book is vitiated with extravagant tirades on taxation and excise-men, with lamentations on the degeneracy of English farmers, and with recommendations of bacon and ale for breakfast.

His twelve 'Sermons,' which might rather be called moral essays on passages of Scripture, indicate a larger acquaintance with the Old and New Testaments than Cobbett, from his other writings, might have been thought to possess. His sermon "On the Unnatural Mother" echoes, with good reason, but with too little nicety of language, Rousseau's exhortations to mothers to nurse their own children. The sermon "On the Sin of Forbidding Marriage" contains just animadversions on the vicious celibacy of the Romish clergy, and on other immoralities. Those "On God's Judgment on Unjust Judges," and "On God's Vengeance against Public Robbers," have, as it may be supposed, a political purpose. Cobbett used to vaunt the superiority of his sermons over those of the clergy on the ground of their greater sale; and the volume is certainly, with all its faults, deserving of attention. With these discourses is sometimes bound up a tract of Cobbett's called 'Good Friday, or the Murder of Christ by the Jews,' written against that foolish "modern liberality" which asks whether, as the Jews had the same Maker with us, we should not show them favour. Yes, says Cobbett, and God also "made the serpent and the crocodile, yet He teaches us to shun serpents and crocodiles." God also made the devil, and *liberality*

might therefore "open wide its indiscriminating arms, and hug to its bosom even the devil himself." But "if," he adds, "we make fellowship with those who call Christ an impostor, we may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive God, who has forbidden us to be yoked together with unbelievers." Much of this tract, and indeed of all the twelve sermons, might have been written by any clergyman. Neither Jews nor Papists, however it may suit him to commend the Romish Church at times, were in reality regarded with much favour by Cobbett.

The Romish Church, for some purpose, he took upon himself to praise in what he called his 'History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland,' published in 1824. What was the real object with which this work was written is uncertain. Whether he produced it, as some have asserted, in the hope of sharing in the subscriptions raised for the Irish patriots, or whether, as others have surmised, with a view to becoming a member of Parliament for some Irish constituency, are questions still unsettled. But never was the name of history given to any book with so little show of reason. It consists of special eulogies of the Roman Catholic priesthood, and the state of things in England when the Romish religion prevailed, and of resolute abuse of all that were concerned in the "Reformation," and utter condemnation of all the consequences of which it has been productive. When a third part of the revenues of the country were in the hands of the Church, the land was pervaded, if we believe Cobbett, with "ease and happiness, and harmony and Christian charity," instead of the "misery, beggary, nakedness,

hunger, and everlasting wrangling and spite," which the people have since been doomed to suffer. The reader may learn from the pages of this volume that the Catholic religion, as it existed in the time of Luther, and as it is still in the main upheld, was the only Christian religion in the world for 1500 years after the death of Christ.* A glance at the history of the Church in England for 900 years before the reign of Henry VIII. will show how unjustly and ungratefully the Catholic Church, its popes, monks, and priests, have been slandered and vilified.† If the Catholic Church had never been plundered, England never would, and never could, have heard the hideous sound of the words pauper, pauperism, and poor-rate.‡ Not only the distress in England, but nine-tenths of the corruption and crime in it, public and private, have originated from the ravagers and hypocrites that wrought the change in religion.§ Even the doctrines of Malthus,‖ and the national debt,¶ are the consequences of the Protestant Reformation; and bank-notes are a "purely Protestant invention, expressly intended to keep out Popery."** We could hardly expect to be believed, by those who have not read the book, when we say that it contains such extravagances as these, unless we could give references for each particular; for we might be thought to be quoting from a comic history rather than from one written in savage earnest. Queen Mary, who endeavoured to remedy the evil wrought by her father, Henry VIII., was never equalled in exalted virtues, piety, charity, generosity,

* Sect. 10. † Sect. 44. ‡ Sect. 120. § Sect. 192.
‖ Sect. 2. ¶ Sect. 209. ** Sect. 258.

sacred adherence to truth and honour, and feelings of anxiety for the greatness and glory of England, by any sovereign that has sat on the English throne, Alfred alone excepted, whose religion she sought to re-establish.* But as for those whom she put to death, and who are glorified as *martyrs*, "they were generally a set of most wicked wretches, who had sought to destroy the Queen and her Government, and, under the pretence of conscience and superior piety, to obtain the means of again preying on the people." They were irreclaimable by mild means, and "were worthy of ten thousand deaths each, if ten thousand deaths could have been endured; they were, without a single exception, apostates, perjurers, or plunderers; and the greater part of them had also been guilty of flagrant high treason against Mary herself, who had spared their lives, but whose lenity they had requited by every effort within their power to overset her authority and the Government." Among "the ruffians that perished on this occasion" were "three of Cranmer's bishops and himself;" for "this most mischievous of all villains" was now brought to the stake to which he had caused others to be tied. "The three others were Hooper, Latimer, and Ridley, each of whom was indeed inferior in villany to Cranmer, but to few other men that have ever existed."† Cranmer is elsewhere said to have spent twenty-nine years "in the commission of a series of acts which, for wickedness in their nature and for mischief in their consequences, are absolutely without anything approaching to a parallel in the annals of human infamy." When Cobbett wrote this,

* Sect. 258. † Sect. 249.

he seems to have forgotten what he said of Henry VIII., whom, of all concerned in the Reformation in England, he seems to have thought deserving of the largest share of detestation. But the foreign schismatics and revolters from the Papal authority are not to be suffered to escape animadversion. The terms in which the historian of the Reformation speaks of these authors of reform are at once astonishing and ludicrous. "Perhaps the world has never, in any age, seen a set of such atrocious miscreants as Luther, Zuinglius, Calvin, Beza, and the rest of the distinguished Reformers of the Catholic religion. Every one of them was notorious for the most scandalous vices, even according to the full confession of his own followers. They agreed in nothing but in the doctrine that good works were useless, and their lives proved the sincerity of their teaching, for there was not a man of them whose acts did not merit a halter."* On Algernon Sydney and Lord William Russell he animadverts, as traitors and ingrates, with something of justice; and these are the only characters of that day whom he shows reason in censuring. But with the history of those times he mixes up tirades about the Six Acts, the flogging of the soldiers at Ely, the fate of Thistlewood and his crew, and other political matters of his own day, rendering the book so absurd a combination of heterogenous materials, that, but for the vigour and earnestness of its style, it would never have obtained a reader. But it suited the views of the Roman Catholics and their supporters so aptly, that it was translated into French, German, Italian, and Spanish; while he

* Sect. 200.

himself sold, as he tells us, 40,000 copies in English.* Nay, it was even, to its author's unbounded gratification, translated into modern Greek; for he asks, in his Register,† "which of Sir Walter Scott's novels was ever translated into Greek?" not knowing that all those novels, which he affected to despise, had received that honour.

One of the pamphlets written against this History was happily furnished with the following motto, taken from Cobbett's Register of January 1821, written only three years before he began to eulogise the Roman Catholics: "We have all heard about the tricks of *Monks* and *Friars*. These tricks are very numerous; many of them very farcical. The *Monks* and *Friars* had but *one single object in view*—namely, that of *living well upon the labours of others*. This was with them *the Law and the Gospel*." No priests, he says in the same passage, had surpassed the Popish priests in cunning.

His 'Legacy to Parsons,' impudently dedicated to Bishop Blomfield, consists chiefly of matter extracted from his 'History of the Reformation.' A pamphlet in reply to it, called 'Cobbett's Questions in his *Legacy to Parsons* answered by a Parson,'* contained a passage well worthy of being quoted: "The evil motives and personal faults of some of the agents in the Reformation (upon which Cobbett dwells with such spiteful pleasure) are no prejudice to the excellence of the Reformation itself. Let the unbridled lust of Henry VIII., the unprincipled rapacity of the house of Rus-

* Second Part, Introduction, sect. 52.

† Anonymous—Newcastle, 1836.

sell and others, the pitiable vacillation of Cranmer, the shameless tergiversation of Parliament in Queen Mary's reign, the political severities of Elizabeth, be magnified to Cobbett's heart's content, yet will the Church of England be free from blame. She was no partaker of the crimes which human passions mixed up with the reformation of religion, any more than she is now a partaker of the sins of those who are plotting the abasement and destruction of religion."

His 'History of the Regency and Reign of George IV.,' published in 1830, is such a production as might be expected from one who proclaimed himself a Radical Reformer. He finds nothing right that had been done, either by Pittites or Foxites, for several years past, for Pitt and Fox had been alike impostors and deluders of the multitude; and as for the reign of George IV., it had been productive of greater misery than any ten former reigns, that of George III. not excepted, though that reign had justly been called "a reign of taxation and terror." Of course the atrocities of Peterloo are duly noted, as well as the imprisonment of reformers by Sidmouth and Castlereagh; and Thistlewood, Ings, Tidd, and Brunt are praised as "four of the bravest men that ever died;" men who meant well to the King and the people, though they intended evil to the Ministry. In speaking of the part which he took in favour of the Queen, he admits that he was somewhat actuated by resentment against Castlereagh and Sidmouth for having imprisoned him on account of his censure of the flogging at Ely. He intended, "God giving him life and health, to write a complete history of England, in the same style as his 'History of the Reforma-

tion;'"* but the public may be well content to have been spared the infliction of it.

His 'Woodlands, a Treatise on Planting,' a rather large volume, was written chiefly to recommend the locust-tree, which he had introduced into England from America, and which he was ever praising, from its extreme hardness, as being pre-eminently fit for certain parts of machinery and ships, as well as for axle-trees, posts, and gates. His eulogies of this tree excited such a rage for cultivating it in 1823, and the five or six following years, that he sold more than a million of plants, and imported seeds from America by tons. Lord Folkestone planted thirteen thousand six hundred at Coleshill, near Highworth, in Wiltshire.† The name Locust, for a tree, had not been heard in England till Cobbett introduced it. It is the *Robinia Pseud-Acacia* of Linnæus, and of the nurseries, in which there were plenty of these plants, but nobody would buy them because they were not "Cobbett's Locusts." The tree, however, is of little value, for it does not improve with age; and when the trunk exceeds a foot in diameter, it is generally found decayed at the heart. It requires also a rich soil; its roots run so much on the surface as to interfere with other vegetation, and its branches are so brittle as to be easily broken off by the wind.‡

The 'Treatise on Cobbett's Corn' shows its object in its title. Cobbett extolled the Indian corn for its productiveness; but it was unacceptable to the people of

* Advice to Young Men, p. 302. † Rural Rides, p. 418, 419.

‡ Loudon's Trees and Shrubs of Great Britain; Quarterly Review, vol. lxii. p. 340.

this country from the excessive dryness of its flour, requiring, as Cobbett himself admits, to be mixed with one-third, or even one-half, of rye or wheat flour, "to prevent cracking and crumbling."

The translation of 'Martens's Law of Nations,' which, as the book pleased the American Government, the booksellers employed Cobbett to produce, has been reprinted in England; and an edition published in 1829 is said to be the fourth. "The merit of a correct translator," says Cobbett in his preface, "is of a nature so very humble, that I scruple not to lay claim to it," a claim which we have never seen disputed.

With the three voluminous works to which his name has been attached, the 'State Trials,' the 'Parliamentary Debates,' and the 'Parliamentary History,' he had little more concern than the mere projection and origination of them. The 'State Trials' were edited by Mr Howell from the commencement, and continued after his death by his son. In the 'Parliamentary Debates,' begun in 1803, he retained some interest till 1812, when the work became wholly the property of Hansard.

What William Cobbett was, both as a writer and a man, has, it is hoped, been not unfairly shown in the preceding pages. He had, like other men, his faults and his merits. If there was matter in his character for censure, there was also matter for commendation, especially in his private life. He was a true husband to a good wife. He was a careful father, anxious for the interests of his children, and desirous to instruct them, as far as his own want of a liberal education allowed him. He was fond of his home and its attrac-

tions. He was temperate; content with the plainest food; abstaining from spirituous liquors, and preferring milk or small beer to any other drink; going to bed early, and rising early, through the whole of his life, to do much of his work before breakfast. He raised himself, by his own persevering efforts, from the condition of a common soldier to a seat in the senate of his country. Nor can he be accused of having truckled, in his political course, to any party, for he attacked all parties at his will; and his offer to the Government to discontinue his Register when he was in difficulties, being accompanied by no expressions of submission, or proposals of support, carried no intimation of a servile laying down of arms; while he certainly adhered to the declaration, made in the early part of his life, that he would never be a recipient of the public money. It would have been well for him if he had been as strict in his trading concerns, less prone to speculate, and less disposed to repudiate pecuniary obligations.

If he was coarse, there was also, with his coarseness, the vigour and boldness which his countrymen love and admire. Whatever object he had in pursuit, great or small, he pursued, as long as it continued to be his object, with unflinching resolution. His veerings about as a journalist often arose from the necessity of fixing on some topic for the day, which, conscious of his power and versatility, he advocated without any great care whether his arguments were in harmony with those of the day before, or would be supported by those of the day following.

Had he had full scholastic instruction, and the

benefit of extensive reading, his abilities, cultivated and improved, might have placed his name with many of the highest in literature. As it was, his boldness wanted knowledge and judgment to control it; he was ignorant of much that the most ordinary writers ought to understand; he had no proper conception of the estimate in which the giants of literature are to be held. He pronounced it easy to imitate Shakspeare because the public had been partially deluded for a while by Ireland's "Vortigern;" and easy to copy Milton, because any one could make angels and devils fight like men. Having sense to see the vanity of pretending to be what he was not, he affected to decry what he did not possess; and yet, though he proclaimed his contempt for the learned languages as useless, he would fain have had his public think that he was not altogether ignorant of them, as was shown by his writing always *per centum*, and introducing now and then a Latin expression, as *odi Græcam urbem; jucunda oblivia vitæ, non civium ardor*, &c.; *virtutem ex hoc, fortunam ex illo*. But some of these phrases may have been supplied him by others. He ventured once to censure a word of Canning's, "inchoate," which he ignorantly made into *incohete*, and interpreted, "destitute of cohesion." Of the little that he had read in English he retained a fair recollection, as of scraps of plays, which he sometimes used with good effect. Shakspeare he is said not to have read till he was thirty-five years old.

His egotism is as often amusing as offensive. His attitude, whatever subject he treated, showed that he was resolved to allow nobody to be in the right but

himself, and those who submitted to his dictates. He was especially ready to attack any thing or person that was eminent, or that the public praised. *Nitor in adversum*, as somebody said, was a motto to which no man had a better title. But in the style in which he set forth his declarations, however extravagant, there was sure to be something attractive; whatever he supported or assailed, his readers would never fail to find something to interest or amuse them. To produce this effect, a fund of good sense was necessary in handling his matter, however unsound might be the premises from which he started. Even the 'Quarterly Review,' after all its depreciation of him, confessed that he must be allowed to have had strong common-sense, and, if he had much of the *rusticus* and *abnormis*, to have had also much of the *sapiens*. Many of his attacks on men and things are attributed by the author of 'Historical Characters,' in his very favourable sketch of Cobbett, to love of sport rather than love of mischief. But the savage earnestness of his invective on most occasions, especially after he became a thorough Radical, shows that the love of mischief predominated.

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